

SPIRITUAL HEALING FOR WOMEN
EXPERIENCING HURT
FROM DIVORCE

Elsie Perry Daniels

B.A., Bennett College, 1969
M.Ed., Augusta State University, 1981
Ph.D., Old Dominion University, 1997

Faculty Mentors

Daryl R. Hairston, D. Min
Lucius M. Dalton, D. Min

A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
DAYTON, OHIO
May, 2013

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
DEDICATIONS	vii
TABLES.....	viii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER	
1. THE MINISTRY FOCUS.....	4
2. THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL.....	18
3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION	35
4. METHODOLOGY	93
5. FIELD EXPERIENCE	97
6. REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION.....	110
APPENDIX	
A. DIVORCE SUPPORT GUIDE	119
B. PRE AND POST-SURVEY QUESTIONS.....	123
BIBLIOGRAPHY	127

ABSTRACT

SPIRITUAL HEALING FOR WOMEN

EXPERIENCING HURT

FROM DIVORCE

by

Elsie Perry Daniels
United Theological Seminary, 2013

Mentors
Daryl R. Hairston, D. Min
Lucius M. Dalton, D. Min

The objective of this project was to determine if a ministry model based on spiritual knowledge of scripture and supported by pastoral leadership would help bring spiritual healing to women experiencing hurt from divorce. Using Scott's Revival Church, an interdenominational church in Franklin, Virginia as the context, the researcher used survey research and participant verbal responses to collect qualitative data to gauge the effectiveness of the model. Divorced, remarried, teen and adult children of divorced individuals attended divorce support sessions. Results from self-administered pre- and post- surveys and positive participant responses indicated that the divorce support ministry was effective.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is an old African proverb that states, “It takes a village to raise a child.” When it comes to completing my dissertation, it was truly a village and several neighboring communities of special people who helped me achieve this milestone. While there were many who were instrumental during this process, there is only enough space to acknowledge a few key supporters. Without these individuals my goal may not have been achieved.

It is imperative that I express my dearest and sincerest gratitude to Dr. Harold Hudson, Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies, for making it possible for this degree to become a reality. I have to follow by expressing my sincere appreciation to my awesome mentors, Dr. Daryl Hairston and Dr. Lucius Dalton, for accepting me into the Collaborative Leadership group and encouraging me to complete the program. Your support was invaluable. Dr. Ryche Breidenstein was “expertise” and “sunshine on a cloudy day.” Thank you for your positive attitude even when there were things to be done. Dr. Doug Ervin, thanks for going after the lost sheep. A special debt of gratitude goes to my other committee members: Dr. Evelyn Square (my pastor), Minister Linda Porter (my context associate) and Dr. Ceola Davis-Barnes (my peer associate). Thank you, Janice Kronour, for your help throughout this journey.

My contextual associates, who worked enthusiastically and shared their comments and ideas on my work were invaluable: Elder Linda Porter, Leshawn Kee, Lakeisha Sparks-Lassiter, Debbie Reid, Katherine Brown, Minister Mazina Porter, Dorothy Boone, Christine Perry, Matthew Perry and Evelyn Barr. They supplied the hard work, love and encouragement.

Words cannot express how much I appreciate my priceless network of supportive, generous, loving friends and family who reviewed, edited, proofed, discussed, stimulated, challenged, prayed and cheered me on: Selma Spicer, Treva Green, Vincent Hale and Crystal Square-Williams. Brenda Banks single-handedly took on the timely, tedious task of making sure I did not have to cut corners. Dr. Deborah Hale, Dr. Linda Deans, Dr. Janet Mckenzie and Major Marc Daniels took the first doctoral journey with me. They remain the wind beneath my wings.

None of this would have been possible without the home team—April Britt, Gloria Fernandez, Gail Cheek, Tawanda Jones, Debbie Washington, Danita Walker—my God-sent angels. They made it possible for me to attend intensive peer sessions as well as graduation.

Finally, special recognition goes to Evangelist Gena “Mama” Johnson from Trenton, New Jersey. I met her at the 2012 Ministers’ Conference at Hampton, University. She ignited the spiritual inspiration I needed to return to the program. She said to me, “God says, ‘It’s your season.’” I have to say, “To God be the glory.”

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the memory of my parents

Herbert G. and Jeanette W. Perry

Gail
for being the sister you are

Marc
my miracle son
who has remained my forever “side-kick”
for your support, your enduring love
two tours in Afghanistan and one in Iraq

Sonia
for being a great person and the best daughter-in-law ever

Marlon
my other miracle son
for taking care of me
for your heart and spirit that makes me so proud of you

the grandkids
who allow me to see the world through their eyes
Tyler, Donovan, Marissa, and Mia

TABLES

1–3	Participant Survey Responses to Questions	1, 2, 3	101
4–6	Participant Survey Responses to Questions	4, 15, 5.....	102
7–9	Participant Survey Responses to Questions	7, 12, 13.....	103
10–12	Participant Survey Responses to Questions	14, 8, 9.....	104
13–15	Participant Survey Responses to Questions	10, 11, 17.....	105
16–18	Participant Survey Responses to Questions	18, 6, 16.....	106
19	Participant Survey Responses to Questions	19	107

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the biblical and civil regulation of marriage, divorce and remarriage that presents enormous challenges for divorced women. Interpretations of biblical text form the basis of denominational practices that affect church regulations and congregational experiences of divorced individuals. The waters are murky for women because of the Old and New Testament grounds for divorce based on adultery (of the woman) and harlotry. The researcher views biblical regulation as a theological layer requiring Christian divorced women to ‘dig deeper’ for spiritual and emotional healing. Civil regulation directly affects life situations such as social status, finances and parenting. The prevalence and widespread ramifications of divorce in the United States present pastors, as God-chosen leaders, with the opportunity to minister to individuals recovering from divorce. This is a population that is often overlooked; however, it is in need of pastoral guidance and care. It is a kingdom assignment that has to be intentional to be effective. This study presents a model for instituting a divorce support ministry in churches.

Chapter One introduces the three-fold goal of the study along with the context and rationale for the study. The reader is introduced to the complexities and obstacles that should be considered as ‘in progress plans’ for implementation. A partial description of the potential participants is included. The decision to end a relationship can be traumatic, chaotic and filled with contradictory emotions that differ in type and intensity. Divorce

has usurped marriage as a “divine ideal” creating negative and harmful results particularly for women.

Chapter Two presents scholarly research and studies relating to the numerous challenges and hardships faced by divorced women. Divorce and remarriage are examined from civil and denominational perspectives. This chapter discusses divorce-work, a process of constructively using emotional and stress intervention resources focused on transformation, as an effective eclectic approach to divorce recovery and healing. The rationale for church involvement and denominational positions on divorce is discussed in hope that pastors are inspired to minister to this population.

Chapter Three discusses the biblical, theological, and historical theoretical foundation of the study. The researcher approaches the ideo-stories of Gomer (Hosea 1:2—2:2) and the woman at the well (John 8:1:11) from a visionary-metaphorical point of view (no marriage, allegorical harlotry). The interpretations presented provide the theoretical foundation the study. In this chapter, the reader is introduced to two women in the Bible in need of divorce support. In first-century, Jewish, patriarchal culture, both women are already marginalized. Similar to the plight of Gomer and the woman at the well, divorcées are often unjustly, subconsciously presented as the epitome of sin and failure. The theological foundation of this study discusses the womanist theology as an avenue to spiritual healing. The historical section of chapter three traces the Old and New Testament history of divorce for the purpose of providing possible explanations for significant differences and disagreements among theologians, denominations, national and international religious leaders and pastors over the inconsistencies in the interpretation of scripture concerning marriage, divorce and remarriage.

Chapter Four includes the hypothesis and describes the research design and methodology used to offer the divorce support program. A team of volunteers was selected and trained to work in the ministry. A pre- and post- survey was used to collect data. The description of the methodology includes session times, dates, topics and ministry team training. The target population was divorced or separated individuals with no plans to reunite, and teen and adult children of divorced and/or separated parents. Results from the survey indicated that the ministry was effective and well received by the participants.

Chapter Five describes the qualitative research method used to assess the effectiveness of the support program. This section includes the pre- and post- survey questions and participants' responses. Data analysis and the results are reported.

Chapter Six explains the purpose and intentions for initiating this study. I embarked on this project in search of answers to questions I had about what God really said about divorce and remarriage. I remembered what I had heard about divorce as a child in church. My efforts to connect what I had heard with the realities of the present were futile. I expected quick, simple, easy answers. I was surprised, almost overwhelmed, at the depth, breadth, and complexity of divorce related issues and problems. I have completed this study with more questions while pondering how to present persuasive arguments to increase positive church involvement. The support program was a success. The participants were outstanding and continue to bond.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MINISTRY FOCUS

The ministry focus of this project is to demonstrate a way churches can aid in the recovery of women hurting from divorce and/or separation. Specifically, it presents a framework of a model for divorce support ministry. The goal is three-fold. First, to demonstrate the need for divorce support programs and explain how these programs have been impeded by historical, religious and cultural interpretations of scripture. Second, to demonstrate how religious leaders, especially pastors, are key to reaching this population of hurting individuals. Third, to demonstrate that divorced individuals will respond favorably to divorce support programs as a church ministry. This project describes how a pastoral ministry for divorced individuals effected spiritual change in the lives of individuals experiencing hurt from divorce.

Because sociologists have paid little attention to the experience of divorce in religious congregations, most studies addressing religion and divorce have been based on quantitative analysis of large samples and are concerned with causal relationships.¹ Nevertheless, church congregations have members who are single, married, divorced or separated. Many talented and anointed Christians, because of theologically complex,

¹ Kathleen E. Jenkins, "In Concert and Alone: Divorce and Congregational Experience," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 2 (2010): 278–292.

human created moral and ethical restrictions, live a life less than what God intended for them.² Divorce is often a traumatic crisis. Compounding the trauma of divorce is the Christian debate about marriage, divorce and remarriage.

The intent is to encourage churches and their leaders to develop policies and outreach ministries that reflect the heart and spirit of Christ for divorced women. For many individuals, church is a communal experience that provides celebration for happy events, help in times of trouble and comfort in times of sorrow. However, the sociocultural context surrounding divorce in the United States has historically been one of disapproval on moral grounds.³ Acceptance of divorce has risen; however, conflicting religious dogma, practices and biblical interpretations remain a source of strife for individuals in need of spiritual support while coping with divorce.

Because many religious traditions sacralize marriage and discourage divorce,⁴ spiritual leaders set the tone for the congregation. A ministry for divorced individuals is often a rescue and/or recovery initiative. Many leaders are silent about church policies and issues about divorce. Conservatives, Protestants, liberal Protestants, Roman Catholic and other Christian groups have different beliefs about which conditions in the Bible permits divorce, if any. The groups that interpret the Bible as permitting divorce may or may not allow remarriage and each group believes their interpretation is the ‘correct’⁵

² Sherman Nobles, *God is a Divorcee Too!* (Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing, LLC, 2004), 2.

³ E. J. Krumrei, A. Mahoney, and K. I. Pargament, “Divorce and the Divine: The Role of Spirituality in Adjustment to Divorce,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71 (2009): 90.

⁴ Jenkins, 278.

⁵ Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), viii.

interpretation. Divorce and remarriage is considered by some Christians to be unforgiveable sins.

This study establishes a divorce support program for individuals who are divorced or have been affected by divorce. The researcher investigates New and Old Testament doctrines commonly used by some denominations to establish or regulate marriage, divorce and remarriage in their congregations. Specifically, the study addresses the impact of the Mosaic Law, Shammai and Hillel rabbinical schools and Pauline Privilege regarding divorce and divorced individuals.

Most of the rhetoric about divorce centers on the definitions of marriage, grounds and procedures for divorce and adultery (or harlotry). The study addresses adultery and harlotry in the Bible as they pertain to divorce. The selected Old Testament text (Hosea 2:9) appears to heap accolades on Hosea for marrying Gomer, a harlot; however, close scrutiny of text presents abusive behavior that the researcher sees as uncharacteristic of God. In the midst of the dialogue and rhetoric on marriage, divorce and remarriage are hurting individuals wondering why God has forsaken them when they need Him most.

It is important that church leaders present clear and concise teachings, instruction and counseling on marriage, divorce and remarriage.⁶ Dissonance exists when church policies are not clear as a result of different Biblical interpretations, and divorce is stigmatized and demonized. The objective of this project is to minister in a way that draws the individual to accept Jesus Christ as their savior and leads the individual to healing that enables her/him to walk in God's destined purpose and be able to reach out to others.

⁶ Adams, 4.

About the Researcher

Currently the researcher is an ordained elder, works with the women's ministry and oversees the new divorce support program for individuals who are divorced, separated, adult children of divorced or separated parents. As facilitator for the divorce support ministry, the researcher works to see participants heal emotionally and spiritually, progressing to a level of healing and awareness that enables them to reach out and minister to others in and out of the church. They will be able to articulate and use their experiences to minister to others. The researcher occasionally delivers sermons, teaches Bible study, speaks at women's retreats, conducts workshops, gives presentations, officiates and assists with funerals.

The researcher is uniquely qualified to investigate this area of ministry because she was raised in a raised in a Pentecostal church that taught divorce was a sin. This background presented extensive church exposure to traditional church interpretations on marriage and divorce. Divorce was a sin; remarriage while the ex-spouse was still living was an unforgiveable sin. The researcher saw new converts who had been divorced return to former spouses who had already remarried. These remarriages never worked, and the members would eventually stop attending church.

Very little was ever discussed about developing good marriage relationships. Everything was to be taken to God in prayer while you wait for a miraculous change to come. There were members in the church who lived in very abusive situations. They stayed in the abusive relationships and were taught to pray and passively accept the treatment. If they prayed enough, long enough and did everything the Bible said, the Lord would save the spouse. The saved spouse had to model Christian behavior towards the

spouse. If the non-believing spouse was not saved, the believing spouse was at fault. As a child and teenager, the researcher saw this happen repeatedly. This disturbed the researcher's mental image of God. God was portrayed as a God just waiting to punish the believer if the believer missed a step. The idea of divorce as an unforgiveable sin remained subconsciously with the researcher for many years.

On the other hand, the researcher was taught that God was a miracle working God. She witnessed this at church and in her home. Her family would be considered traditional because her parents had six children and stayed married to each other for fifty-seven years. The researcher never heard the word divorce mentioned in her home. The marriage ended when her father died. Her mother and father did an amazing job of keeping their family in tact and raising six children on an income far below the poverty level because her mother was a praying woman. She would have everyone in the house come down on Sunday mornings for corporate prayer. Corporate prayer always ended with the Lord's Prayer. God took care of healthcare. Every illness was taken to the Lord in prayer. Her two younger siblings had asthma, and one also had convulsions. There was no money for doctors. Her mother prayed, and they were miraculously healed.

Against this spiritual backdrop, the researcher entered adulthood knowing that God is powerful but with serious questions about God's position on numerous life issues. Following high school, the researcher attended a United Methodist college; however, the researcher was totally unprepared for the chapel worship services that were so different from her Pentecostal experiences. For four years, the researcher attended chapel four times a week without making any spiritual connections with chapel services and her Pentecostal upbringing.

After college, as a trailing military spouse, the researcher visited churches and read the Bible cover to cover several times. The first time the researcher completed reading the Bible, the researcher expected earth shattering, enlightening spiritual revelations. To her surprise, the Bible did not support most of the religious practices to which the researcher had been exposed. To her disappointment, the researcher could not connect the Old and New Testaments. The researcher had been dismissed from a church for violating the dress code, being briefly and unequally yoked once and remarried. She never directly addressed church policies regarding divorce with the leaders; however, she surmised the church positions from sermons, church discussions and gossip.

The researcher needed to get acquainted with a loving side of God. This is what motivated the researcher to integrate women like Gomer and the woman at the well into church life. The researcher's experiences visiting churches did not turn up many churches that offered spiritual guidance for people with marital or divorce issues. Such churches seemed to offer assurance that God had the answer; if one looked hard enough, one would find it.

There are four pastors who were instrumental in redirecting the researcher back to church. After she relocated to Virginia to assist with her father's care, she joined Faith Deliverance Christian Center under the leadership of a pastor whose childhood upbringing, like hers, was Pentecostal. The pastor had been raised in a church where it was a sin for women to wear pants. However, she had not abandon the Pentecostal faith; she sought to change it from the inside out. She was cognizant of the bridge needed to connect the rigid Pentecostal teachings from our past with our present life. The researcher witnessed the church leaders applying the Pentecostal doctrine in a contemporary society.

This was contextual theology applied. Instead of excluding unbelievers, there were outreach ministries that reached unbelievers from all walks of life. Her contribution to the researcher's spiritual growth was the reminder that God gave humanity "free will." The researcher could see the practical application of the gospel changing lives.

Eight years later, following graduation from a doctoral program and one year back in the classroom in Virginia, the researcher moved to Texas to work for a corporation. There the researcher joined a United Methodist church and met her most influential spiritual mentor. Another pastor (mentor) took the time and effort to support, encourage and guide her entrance into the field of ministry. This United Methodist, with structured service formats and detailed organization, was different for the researcher. However, there was no disconnect between what the researcher had been taught in the Pentecostal faith and the United Methodist teachings. The United Methodists as a denomination have invested a tremendous amount of time and effort documenting, structuring and explaining the Biblical message. The literature seems to leave no stone unturned almost to the point of limiting God's prerogative to inject spontaneous intervention and demonstrative expressions of praise and worship.

However, in the United Methodist Church, the researcher came to appreciate structure, doctrine and the value of tradition. The scriptural message was easier to understand and explain. It was there that the researcher submitted to God's call on her life. She became aware of many aspects and areas of kingdom service and entered the ordination candidacy tract.

In the United Methodist candidacy process, the researcher was assigned a mentor for one year. As the researcher progressed through the mentorship workbook, the

researcher started to question her seemingly difficult, awkward, cumbersome, complex life and spiritual walk. Her Pentecostal beliefs were embedded in her spirit; however, the reality of her life seemed incompatible with her Pentecostal indoctrination. Her mentor explained, “God uses all of our experiences.” While in Texas, the researcher was introduced by a fellow church member to Bible Study Fellowship. Bible Study Fellowship is a seven-year, in-depth, international Bible study program. Bible Study Fellowship provided the information the researcher needed to understand the Old Testament and New Testament. Her Bible confusion cleared and the Word became alive in her life.

In October 2003, the researcher relocated to Virginia to care for her mother and reunited with her current pastor who was familiar with the early church. They were raised in the same denomination. While the researcher had struggled with the teachings and practices of her early faith, her childhood friend had remained steadfast in the Pentecostal denomination, updated with the times and applied the teachings in a way that brought the researcher’s struggles with her early religious teachings and her contemporary spiritual awareness full circle. The researcher’s concept of family changed through interaction with the pastor. Over the years, her childhood friend and now pastor had sown what the researcher considered seeds of enlightenment into her life. The early church teachings focused on the supernatural power of faith in God. The pastor adapted and applied it to contemporary reality. The pastor connected the faith the researcher developed as a child and teenager with the walk God had for her now.

In conversations with fellow divorced Christians, the researcher has heard personal accounts of harsh church experiences. They related personal experiences of

being dismissed from church, having church members shun them, discussing matters with pastors who offered no spiritual support, not being invited for fellowship, and the list goes on. As one who has regularly attended church while not feeling connected, the researcher can recognize and relate to others who feel like they are present but not counted—the real “you” is invisible.

The researcher is in a spiritual place where she can reach out to others. Ups and downs are no longer viewed as successes or failures. Rather, the ups and downs are viewed as learning experiences, opportunities and tests to better prepare her to fulfill God’s purpose for her life. The researcher is at a different spiritual place now, with new experiences in her spiritual repertoire. Hindsight acknowledges errors, mistakes and bad decisions. Today the researcher sees a progressive walk with God with power, restoration and direction. The researcher believes individuals should prepare well for what God assigns them to do. A doctorate in ministry is part of her preparation. She is expecting God to open earthly doors and allow her to minister in a broader arena.

The Context

The geographic location for the study is Franklin, Virginia, a town with a population of approximately 8,588 and land area of 8.75 square miles.⁷ There are fifty-nine churches in the city with eight listed as non-denominational, two as Apostolic and

⁷ City of Franklin, Virginia, “Living in Franklin: Population,” *City of Franklin, Virginia: Growth, Community, Spirit*, www.franklinva.com/index.php?option=comcontent&view=article&id=40&Itemid=179 (accessed October 30, 2012).

one as Pentecostal.⁸ The remaining churches are mainline denominations. Approximately 55.7% of the residents are African-American and 55.1% are females. The median household income is \$33,174, and 22.1% are listed below poverty level.⁹ Participation in the divorce support program was extended to the entire community.

The church, founded by a husband and wife team, is an independent interdenominational church with Pentecostal roots. The husband preached his initial sermon in 1954 and opened Scott's Revival Center with his musically talented family in 1966. His dual ministry responsibilities included Assistant Pastor at one church and pastor at another church. He eventually rose to the position of bishop. The church has been a part of the community at the same location for forty-seven years. In 2004, the Bishop turned the pastorate over to his daughter. The researcher joined the church in 2004, shortly after her installation.

The Pastor operates in the gifts of healing, discernment, and prophecies. The services are conducted according to the leading of God as revealed to the Pastor. It is not unusual for the order of service to change because God leads the Pastor in a direction different from the planned program. The order of the service could be described as unorthodox. It is not unusual for follow-up reports to substantiate that lives (spiritual and natural) have been saved or miracles have taken place. Services seldom conclude without an opportunity to accept Christ or prayer for special and specific requests. The gospel is

⁸ CLR, "Franklin, VA: Education Level Profile and Enrollment Statistics," CLRChoice, INC. [www.clsearch.com/Franklin Demographics/VA/Education-Level-and-Enrollment-Statistics](http://www.clsearch.com/Franklin%20Demographics/VA/Education-Level-and-Enrollment-Statistics) (accessed October 30, 2012).

⁹ Ibid.

intended for all humankind, and this ministry reaches a population in need of revelation and breakthroughs. The church has an active children's ministry, marriage ministry, singles ministry and prison ministry. Some individuals who are divorced or separated participate in the single or marriage ministry.

Of the 200 members, information regarding marital status is available for approximately 123. Information regarding relationship status is based on voluntary self-reporting. Divorce is a sensitive, traumatic and sometimes taboo topic that many individuals find difficult to discuss. In situations where a husband and wife attended the same church during the marriage, one or both of the individuals may leave and join other churches where they never mention their marital status in the new church. In some situations, individuals are separated, divorced and remarried but never reveal this information. The statistical information regarding marital status is as accurate as possible. Of the membership reporting, 36% are married, 22% divorced, 40% single and 2% separated. These statistics point to the need for a divorce support ministry.

Experience and Context Come Together

Marriage is a celebrated occasion. Divorce is cloaked in stigma, shame, embarrassment and congregational silence. Individuals may be uncomfortable with public disclosure of personal lives and emotions, especially divorce. In some instances, divorce is demonized. Demonization is a negative coping response (also known as spiritual struggle) that involves appraising someone or something as related to demonic forces. Individual may cognitively frame a divorce as the work of Satan in order to understand

suffering while maintaining beliefs in a just world or benevolent God.¹⁰ Pastoral ministries need to have ministering skills, proper attitudes, counseling skills and practical applications to serve the growing segment of church members. Ministry is important because of its rippling effect. Ministering to the individuals is invariably ministry to others. The goal for the divorced is to recover and perhaps reach out to others. Divorce becomes a part of their past that filters into the future and future relationships. It is expected that the Christ-like spirit of the leader will positively influence all members in the congregation and community. An analogy is sometimes made of the church and the hospital. In addition to functioning as social clubs, entertainment centers and gathering places for the self-righteous, they could help hurting people. An official, public, permanent relationship ends.¹¹ Then, the people are sometimes shunned away by the very people who ought to embrace them with God's love and help them grow in the Lord.

Ministry is service for the purpose of: (1) bringing people to saving faith in Christ; (2) assisting them as they grow in Christ-likeness; and (3) bringing every believer into a vital, authentic relationship with God through the grace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, such that every believer glorifies God in thought, word and deed both in the church and in the world with the ultimate goal of presenting every one complete in Christ. The best relationship is a living relationship with God. The desired outcome of sharing ministry is to move people who may feel disconnected from God to wholly focus on God, be powerfully filled with the Spirit and to bask in a community of grace. In and out of tough situations and circumstances, God wants each person to vibrantly exalt

¹⁰ Krumrei, 90.

¹¹ "Marriage Basics," www.psychologytoday.com/basics/marriage (accessed December 10, 2012).

Christ, openly perform works of faith and boldly proclaim the gospel through words and deeds.

The ministry focus is not the “sin” committed by anyone, but providing a ministry of spiritual healing for the inner turmoil of individuals experiencing hurt from divorce. It is so easy to experience church as a social club to which some are welcomed and some are not, but churches need to question this reality, especially for divorced individuals. Too often individuals dealing with divorce may attend regularly, do not disturb the church service, mingle and help with activities, yet remain without their own personal breakthrough.

God’s divine ideal of marriage is not everyone’s reality. However, the church does not have the authority to either allow or forbid divorce. We should focus our efforts on strengthening and empowering individuals and couples, not trying to control them through falsely assumed religious authority.¹² When individuals truly accept Christ and study the Word, God will “fine tune” their lives. The ministry project is based on scripture, so the foundation is solid. The expectation would be that individuals who are divorced would readily participate in the ministry, but so many are embarrassed and hurting, and church history is engrained in their heart and memory.

The church’s responsibility to divorced individuals is to: (1) assist individuals in growing in Christ—developing a personal relationship with Christ, (2) facilitate the restoration of those in crisis, (3) provide communities of acceptance that promote the healing of individuals and families that have experienced the ravages of divorce, (4) hold

¹² Nobles, 200.

tightly to Jesus and with the other hand reach out and embrace broken humanity.¹³ Mark Gaither describes the divorce process as so traumatic that the individual(s) needs an advocate—someone guided by the Holy Spirit who can empathize with them, help them through the process, walk beside them and help them get underway before the pain screams louder than the voice of reason.¹⁴

At this juncture in her life, God has prepared a confident vessel, unafraid and working on becoming a bold instrument for God. God can use all of her experiences. The researcher thanks Him for the heart to reach others. Her many years in silence almost parallels Moses' forty-years in the wilderness. Her mission now is to serve God through service to others. The message to divorced individuals is that God loves you; He cares, no condemnation, no rejection.

¹³ Nobles, 219.

¹⁴ Mark Gaither, *Redemptive Divorce: A Biblical Process that Offers Guidance for the Suffering, Healing for the Offending Spouse* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008, 12).

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

Challenges of Divorced Women

Christians view marriage as a divine institution. Genesis 2:18¹ records the word of God saying, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.” This mandate established the foundation of marriage. The Gospel of John 2:1-9 gives testimony of Jesus affirming the institution of marriage as he performed his first miracle at Cana in Galilee by turning water into wine. Marriage for Christians has the dual status of biblical and civil regulation.

Unfortunately, divorce, from the early history of humankind, disrupted that institution. This disruption, throughout history, created negative and harmful results in the lives of women. According to Anthony Giddens, “The changes in marriage, relationships and visible sexuality are associated with the decline of religion and the rise of rationality - social changes brought about by changes in how individuals view life, which in turn stem from social influences and observations. These developments are also a product of changes in the laws relating to marriage.”²

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New International Version of the Bible.

² Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 10-15.

This chapter will focus on writings and studies relating to many problems and issues faced by divorced women, as well as steps necessary steps to address the problems in order to promote treatment, healing and reconciliation.

Prevalence and Problems

Robert Hughes reports that, “In 1999, there were 19.4 million divorced people in the United States. Over 25% of individuals 18 to 64 were estimated to have been divorced.”³ The divorce rate for first marriages was 50%, 67% of second and 74% of third marriages.⁴ There is statistical disagreement about the divorce rate among Christians; however, there is definite agreement that the divorce rate is increasing rapidly. A study by Bradley Wright, a sociologist using data for the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago (NORC), reported that the divorce rate among Christians is estimated at forty-two percent while religiously unaffiliated Americans have a divorce rate of about fifty percent.⁵ An analysis of the National Survey of Families and Households by Brad Wilcox indicated that Americans who attend religious services several times a month were about thirty-five percent less likely to divorce than those with no religious affiliation. However, conservative Protestants were twenty percent more

³ Robert Hughes, “How Religion Shapes Our Attitude Toward Divorce.” The Huff Post Blog, comment posted March 2013 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/Robert-hughes/does-religion-shape-our-a_b_782885.html?view=print&comm_ref=false (accessed January 17, 2013).

⁴ Jennifer Baker, “Uncontested Divorce Information,” *Forest Institute of Professional Psychology* February 12, 2008 <http://www.articlesfactory.com/articles/law/uncontested-divorce-information.html> (accessed March 27, 2013).

⁵ Bradley R.E. Wright, *Christians Are Hate-Filled Hypocrites ...and Other Lies You've Been Told* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2010), 133.

likely to divorce than the religiously unaffiliated.⁶ According to the Barna Research Group the divorced membership percentage by religious faith is 34% non-denominational, 29% Baptist, Episcopal and Pentecostal 28% each, Methodist 26%, Presbyterian 23%, Catholic, Lutheran, and Atheist/Agnostic 21% each.⁷

According to Hoffman and Ledford, “Divorce marks the loss of a socially valued status. It also marks the entry into a status that sometimes carries a negative stigma and has few clear role definitions. Divorced people not only acquire roles, but they also frequently abandon or lose them, thereby becoming ex-spouses and ex-relatives-in-law.”⁸ Similar to the plight of Gomer and the woman at the well, divorce is often subconsciously equated with sin and failure, regardless of its justification. The nameless woman at the well is a divorcée and a Samaritan--and that means an outcast in Jewish society. Furthermore, she is a woman--and that also means marginalization in first-century, patriarchal culture. The Samaritan woman, along with other women in the New Testament, becomes the epitome of sin, rather than a model for ministry. The Samaritan woman was a real, concrete person whose human condition foreshadowed the state of affairs for divorced women today.⁹

⁶ Christians Question Divorce Rates of Faithful –USAToday.com
www.usatoday30.com/news/religion/2011-03-14-divorce-christians_N.htm# (accessed April 10, 2013)

⁷ Barna Group
<http://www.barna.org/family-kids-articles/42-new-marriage-and-divorce-statistics-released?q=divorce+statistics> (accessed April 3, 2013).

⁸ C. D. Hoffman and D.K. Ledford, “Adult Children of Divorce: Relationships with their Mothers and Fathers Prior to, Following Parental Separation, and Currently.” *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 24, no. 3-4 (1995): 41-58.

⁹ Linda McKinnish Bridges, “Between Text and Sermon: John 4:5-42,” *Interpretation* 48, no. 2 (1994): 173, <http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-2805424> (accessed March 26, 2013).

According to Rawlings and Carter, “three major problem areas precipitated by divorce are autonomy, financial hardship and loneliness.”¹⁰ An additional stressful problem facing about 80% of divorced women is that of being a single parent.¹¹ Single female parents, whether divorced or never married, are often judged and criticized in a social and political context in which they are systematically stereotyped, stigmatized and even despised.¹² Kathleen O’Connell Corcoran, in her article *Psychological and Emotional Aspects of Divorce*, says “Divorce is associated with an increase in depression—people experience the loss of a partner, hopes, dreams and lifestyle. The financial reality of divorce is often hard to comprehend.”¹³

Molina Olga, in two studies conducted two studies of African American women, identified additional problems created by divorce. In an explanatory-descriptive study, questionnaires and scales were used to uncover the family characteristics of the participants. The primary stressors identified by divorced working women in this study included the (1) lack of opportunities to learn job skills for promotions, (2) the inability to continue the desired level of education because of a need to earn money, and (3) having no partner with whom to share responsibilities.¹⁴ Another qualitative study by Molina

¹⁰ Edna I. Rawlings and Dianne K. Carter, *Psychotherapy for Women: Treatment Toward Equality* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1977), 434.

¹¹ Elizabeth Howell and Marjorie Bayes, eds., “Divorced Women,” in *Women and Mental Health*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1981), 406, <http://www.questia.com/read/100287164> (accessed April 1, 2013).

¹² Ruth Sidel, *Unsung Heroines: Single Mothers and the American Dream* (Berkeley, CA: Regents of the University of California Press, 2006), 21.

¹³ Kathleen O’Connell Corcoran, “Psychological and Emotional Aspects of Divorce,” *Mediators and Everything Mediation*, (June 1997) <http://www.mediate.com/articles/psych.cfm#stats> (accessed April 2, 2013).

¹⁴ Olga Molina, “Stresses and Strengths of Working Women in Divorce Support Group.” *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 33, no. 3-4 (2000): 145-158. DOI: 10.1300/J087v33n03_09 (accessed April 7, 2013).

Olga explored working African American women's pre-divorce, divorce and post-divorce experiences. A total of thirty divorced women were interviewed face-to-face by a social worker. The findings indicated that these women faced emotional and financial problems as a result of (1) low salaries, (2) lack of child support and (3) lack of alimony. The participants expressed concern that the consequences of divorce may have been compounded by problems of discrimination. Cultural factors, such as their strong belief in God, close family relationships, strong work ethic and strong achievement orientation (50% returned to college), helped them adjust very well to the divorce.¹⁵

The decision to end a relationship can be traumatic, chaotic and filled with contradictory emotions that differ in type and intensity based on who initiates the divorce. Because of the patriarchal culture of Gomer and the woman at the well, the men initiated the divorce even though the possibility of female manipulation existed. Johanna Nauraine, in her article *Women and Divorce*, makes an emotional contrast between women who chose to end the relationship and those who did not. According to Nauraine, "Those who choose to leave difficult or unhappy marriages are frequently confronted with angry and resistant spouses like Hosea. In contrast, those who are being left must cope with a devastating and sometimes unexpected loss."¹⁶

Legislation often creates problems for divorced women. Divorces laws in the United States are decided by each state. Changes in legislation are negatively impacting women. Women are particularly impacted by "family values" campaigns, covenant marriages (in Louisiana), and the equitable-distribution plan (one-time division of

¹⁵ Olga Molina, "African American Women's Unique Divorce Experiences." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 32, no. 3 (2005): 93-99. DOI: 10.1300/J087v32n03_05, 93-99 (accessed April 7, 2013).

¹⁶ Johanna Nauraine, "Women and Divorce," 2010 <http://www.therapistinchicago.com/women-and-divorce.html> (accessed March 26, 2013).

property rather than alimony or support).¹⁷ Following a divorce, some women are forced to choose between poverty and stigma as a single mother. The income of many women often decreases while the income of men usually increases. Income or the lack of income factors into mothers' having custody of their children. It is not unusual for the economic well-being of the woman to plummet. Men sometimes seek custody rather than pay child support.

The dismantling of the welfare state, particularly in the United States, which has a "welfare-to-work" policy, forces poor single mothers (a group that is disproportionately though not mostly black) to leave their children in order to take minimum-wage jobs.¹⁸ Even though legislation can be problematic, the state responsibility for the failed relationships rests with individuals. Giddens notes that the problems are caused by the changes in intimate relationships seen in the last sixty years - the much greater levels of divorce and separation as people move from one relationship to another, the substantially increased openness about sexuality and much more conspicuous sexual diversity. These changes cannot be understood by assuming they were led by social institutions and the state, not least of all because traditional thinking on both the political left and right has been that both capitalism and the "moral authorities" of the state would prefer the population to have stable monogamous family lives.¹⁹

¹⁷ Cheris Kramarae and Dale Spender, eds., "Routledge International Encyclopedia of Woman" *Global Women's Issues and Knowledge* vol. 2 (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 659, <http://www.questia.com/read/109025325>.

¹⁸ Kramarae, 659.

¹⁹ Giddens, 71.

Divorce-Work

The immediate reaction to and long-term effects of divorce are influenced by and differ across individual circumstances, personal, cultural and religious experiences.²⁰ However, studies have identified substantial stress and relational changes that often follow divorce and the accompanying emotions such as anger, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and for some, emotional instability and mental illness.²¹ The participants in a study by Wallerstein and Blakeslee most recognized the importance self-care and managing emotions during and after a divorce. Shame and grief are private, yet deeply social emotions.²² Much of the literature on emotion-work concentrates on emotional labor as a commodity with brief attention to such labor as private self-work.

Alice Stolper Peppier, in her book, *Divorced and Christian*, describes the experience of divorce. For many people, she says, “It involves loss of appetite, inability to sleep at night, a desire to withdraw from friends, a deep sense of loneliness and failure.”²³ She goes on to say,

You may become overactive for a period and then listless for another ... You may begin eating too much—you may have no appetite for food. You may have insomnia night after night—you may seek sleep as an escape . . . You wish you had professional help; you definitely do not want professional help. You desire to talk to someone and bare your soul; you refuse to talk to anyone and bare your soul. Experiencing divorce, especially for women, is often emotionally and physically equivalent to a catastrophic event. Coupled with emotional trauma is loss of social status, financial—and single parenting issues. Financial difficulties

²⁰ Reva S. Wiseman, “Crisis Theory and the Process of Divorce.” *Social Casework* 56, no.1 (1975): 205–212.

²¹ Paul R. Amato, “The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62, no. 4 (2000): 1269–1287.

²² Wallerstein, 50.

²³ Alice Stolper Peppier, *Divorced and Christian* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia 1974), 21-23.

sometimes factor into custody issues for single parents. Following a divorce, women's income decreases while men's income tend to increase.²⁴

Clearly the state of affairs for the condition described above requires divorce-work. For this study, the researcher prefers the divorce recovery process known as divorce-work. Divorce-work consists of multifarious strategically selected resources (i.e., therapists, counselors, attorneys, family) focused on recovery through self-care, emotional management and recreating yourself. A study by Kathleen Jenkins discusses the effectiveness of three aspects of divorce recovery: (1) divorce-work, (2) emotion-work and (3) congregational experience. Jenkins conducted a four-year study of individuals ending life partnerships while active in their congregations.²⁵

Many recovery studies today apply Giddens' theory of modernity as it relates to social interaction in divorce-work. "Modernity is the transformation of time and space, coupled with the disembedding mechanisms that propel social life away from the hold of pre-established precepts or practices. A major influence, reflexivity, refers to the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge."²⁶ Giddens begins his theoretical work, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, by calling attention to "the new sense of 'identity' that is inevitable after divorce, arguing that it "is an acute version of a process of 'finding oneself' which the social conditions of modernity enforce," a "process of active intervention and transformation."²⁷

²⁴ Peppier, 21-23.

²⁵ Kathleen E. Jenkins, "In Concert and Alone: Divorce and Congregational Experience," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 2 (June 2010): 278-292.

²⁶ Giddens, 20.

²⁷ Giddens, 20.

Anxiety is the natural correlate of dangers of all types. It is caused by disturbing circumstances, or their threat, but also helps mobilize adaptive responses and novel initiatives. Terms such as pain, worry and mourning are repeatedly used by the authors of *Second Chances*. So are ones like courage and resolution. Life throws up personal problems in an apparently random way and . . . some people take refuge in a sort of resigned numbness. Yet many are also able more positively to grasp the new opportunities that open up, as pre-established modes of behavior become foreclosed, and to change themselves.²⁸

In divorce-work, self-identity becomes an inescapable issue. On a daily basis, we make simple choices from what to wear to high-impact decisions about relationships, beliefs and occupations. Earlier societies with a social order based firmly in tradition would provide individuals with (more or less) clearly defined roles, in post-traditional societies we have to work out our roles for ourselves. Uncoupling partners sometimes go through a social process of mourning, finding confidants and transitional people.²⁹

Much mainstream theorizing regarding divorce experience has been psychologically oriented, calling attention to the related emotional work of grief and mourning that takes place through stages.³⁰ When the process of mourning does not occur, the result is often the long-term persistence of hurt feelings, possibly leading to despair and psychological breakdown. According to Giddens,

. . . for the majority of people, in fact, the feelings engendered by divorce seem not to disappear completely with the passing of the years; they may be brought violently alive again by subsequent events, such as the remarriage of the previous partner, financial hardship, or quarrels over how the children should be brought up. Where a partner remains strongly involved emotionally with the other, even in a largely negative way, the results in such situations tend to be an upsurge of bitterness.³¹

²⁸ Giddens, 13.

²⁹ Giddens, 70.

³⁰ Judith S. Wallerstein, and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade After Divorce* (Boston, MA: Ticknor and Fields, 1989), 6.

³¹ Giddens, 71.

According to Otto, et. al., women often have more difficulty “letting go” of old relationships. The disruptive emotion that interferes with “letting go” of the old relationship is anger. Anger is a natural and expected reaction to divorce. Since women have been discouraged or even punished for assertiveness and aggression, divorced women may be in touch with rejection, hurt, guilt, or depression, but not their anger.³²

Women frequently exhibit more emotional and psychological problems following a divorce. Parkes, in his book *Bereavement*, referred to the constellation of feelings following the loss of a relationship as the “separation distress syndrome.”³³ Otto and Otto, indicate that “this syndrome represents ways of adapting to and coping with loss. Women going through divorce go through stages similar to the stages of grief experienced by persons in bereavement.”³⁴ However, getting through the stage of mourning is the key to “reclaiming” yourself. The uncoupled partners have to redefine themselves.³⁵

While divorce is stressful for both parties involved, women tend to experience stress for a longer period of time.³⁶ Divorced women tend to have a heightened sense of personal failure over not succeeding at an important societal role. This sense of personal failure manifests itself as lowered self-esteem, depression and guilt. Because affiliation is

³² Edna I. Rawlings and Dianne K. Carter, “Divorced Women,” in *Women and Mental Health*, Elizabeth Howell and Marjorie Bayes eds. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1981), 410, <http://www.questia.com/read/100287164> (accessed April 1, 2013).

³³ C. M. Parkes, *Bereavement* (New York, NY: International Universities Press, 1972), 45.

³⁴ Rawlings, 410.

³⁵ Wallerstein, 278.

³⁶ R. S. Weiss, “The Emotional Impact of Marital Separation.” *Journal of Social Issues* 32 (1976): 135-145.

important to women, divorce is a disruption of that affiliation and "is perceived not as just a loss of a relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self."³⁷

Thomas Scheff affirms shame broadly as a result of a threat to the social bond, involving a large family of emotions, including, "many cognates and variants—most notably embarrassment, humiliation, and related feelings such as shyness that involve reactions to rejection and/or feelings of failure or inadequacy." For participants in Scheff's study, the social experience of shame was illustrated in their anticipation of gossip and judgment and in their feelings of having failed at a cultural ideal, life partnership. The review of the literature indicated that shame was the feeling most divorced individuals felt when attending church. Scheff notes grief, while not as frequently experienced as shame, is equally social as it "signals the loss of a bond." Most respondents described divorce as a unique type of death and indicated that grief played a central role in their divorce emotion-work. Despite the private nature of emotion-work in confronting shame and grief, respondents saw group worship as generating corporate connection.³⁸

Divorce-work is driven by a pervasive Western therapeutic culture: a complex system of beliefs and practices promoting accepted "strategies of action"³⁹ for handling life disruptions and relationship issues. Ending marriages and life partnerships takes place in a heightened private mode, where cultural strategies support an expectation that one should cultivate a calm rationality to work productively on the self and relationships with others. Wallerstein expresses well the goal of divorce-work, "Following a broken

³⁷ J. B. Miller. *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 93.

³⁸ Thomas J. Scheff, "Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory," *Social Theory* 18, no.1 (2000): 96–97.

³⁹ Anne Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 7.

marriage, each person must ‘reach back into his or her earlier experiences and find other images and roots for independence, for being able to live alone and for undertaking the second chances provided by divorce.’”⁴⁰

Healing

The crisis of divorce or the break-up of a long-term relationship can spark the energy and provide the roadmap to guide women back toward true selfhood.⁴¹ In the process of healing, it is important to address the mental, emotional and physical challenges that arise upon the breakup of a relationship. Equally important is the necessity to connect with our spiritual self, the soul.⁴²

Congregational Experience

Healing for individuals surviving a divorce need the support and understanding of, counselors, attorneys, family members, friends, and the church, especially pastors. Historically, divorce has been identified as the one sin requiring a special combination or ritual to get forgiveness. “On any Sunday morning, there is overwhelming evidence of an epidemic of divorce-linked grief, some of which is long unresolved. For some, the desire to worship will be sabotaged by their numbness, anguish and/or emotional pain.”⁴³ It has

⁴⁰ Wallerstein, 280.

⁴¹ Michele Germain, *The Jill Principle: A Woman's Guide to Healing your Spirit after Divorce or Breakup* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publishing, 2006), 2.

⁴² Germain, 2.

⁴³ Harold Ivan Smith, “Ministry to the Divorced: Your Ebed-Melech Opportunity,” *Enrichment Journal* (2013), http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200003/060_ministry_to_divorced.cfm (accessed March 21, 2013).

been documented that participation in faith communities can provide coping mechanisms and has the potential to promote health and well-being.⁴⁴

The divorced population has been a neglected area of church ministry. The church where congregants assemble to support each other in good times (celebrations) and through hardships suddenly becomes a silent community as divorced women struggle with pain, and fellow congregants search for appropriate ways to support them.

There is a lack of ethnographic investigation of religious experience following a divorce. Kathleen Jenkins investigated the role of divorce-work, emotion, and congregational experience in the divorce recovery process.⁴⁵ Even though millions of Americans turn to their local congregations in times of grief, hardship and celebration, many think of divorce recovery as private work. This is possibly because many religious traditions sacralize marriage and discourage divorce. Regarding church, a number of participants experienced a marked sense of aloneness resulting from shame and congregational silence. Members in the congregations carry with them their personal feelings about divorce. These feelings may influence their attitude toward divorced individuals. Mark Gaither suggests a paradigm shift. The facts of a situation may not change, but we can change our way of viewing others' situations.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Jenkins, 278-292.

⁴⁵ Jenkins, 278-292.

⁴⁶ Mark Gaither, *Redemptive Divorce: A Biblical Process that Offers Guidance for the Suffering, Healing for the Offending Spouse* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 12.

for Christian women, who need an understanding of how God views them; how to respond to what God says about them; as well as how to cope with, or solve, divorce-related problems. Clearly, support and resources for the healing of divorced women are needed to address these concerns.

A study by Krumrei, Mahoney and Pargament examined the role of three spiritual responses to divorce for psychological adjustment: (1) appraising the event as a sacred loss/desecration, (2) engaging in adaptive spiritual coping, and (3) experiencing spiritual struggles. Appraisals of sacred loss/desecration and spiritual struggles were tied to higher levels of depression. Adaptive spiritual coping was tied to greater posttraumatic growth.⁴⁷

Robert Hughes conducted a study that reported Christian perspectives toward “no-fault divorces.” As a civil solution to the increasing number of divorces, some states have “no-fault” divorces. The idea of “no-fault” contradicts the “sin” factor inherent in biblical perspectives of the Christian faith. Since passing “no-fault” laws for divorce, divorce attitude surveys indicate that about half of Americans want stricter laws about divorce; twenty-five percent like the laws as they are and another twenty-five percent think that divorce should be easier.⁴⁸

Individuals with any religious affiliation, especially conservative Protestants, wanted stricter divorce laws. Americans who viewed the Bible as the “literal word of God” and those who viewed the Bible as the “inspired but not literal book” both felt divorce laws were too lax. On the other hand, church attendance, not the profession of

⁴⁷ E. J. Krumrei, A. Mahoney, and K. I. Pargament, “Divorce and the Divine: The Role of Spirituality in Adjustment to Divorce,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71 (May 2009): 373-383.

⁴⁸ Hughes, 1-2.

religious beliefs, was the strongest predictor of attitudes towards divorce. Those who regularly attended church felt that divorce laws should be stricter.⁴⁹

A review of Christian teachings, policies, and practices regarding divorce reveals that denominational views about divorce correlate directly with denominational views about marriage. Several sources were studied to understand the biblical interpretations of scriptures addressing marriage and divorce. The first source read was *Marriage Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible* by Jay E. Adams. This book, copyrighted in 1980, provided a comprehensive, conservative perspective, overview of scriptures, earlier biblical interpretations, denominational beliefs and church practices through the 1970s. All the major Christian groups such as Baptists, Catholics, Protestants and Lutherans have a similar ideology regarding marriage. The issue of divorce has always conflicted with the doctrinal beliefs of most of these groups and has always been considered inappropriate.

In case of eastern orthodox churches, divorce is always discouraged. But there is an exception to this principle. In these groups, divorce is permitted on the grounds of mercy, where the church believes that there is no longer any relation between the man and the woman. In case of conservative Protestants, divorce is not permissible except in cases involving infidelity and physical harm. But Liberal Protestants have an exactly contradictory viewpoint. Due to their more liberal approach towards Christianity, divorce is quite common among people of this group. Although, they have a compassionate behavior towards divorce issues, Liberal Protestants applying for divorce are not considered as people committing a sin. As per the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ

⁴⁹ Charles E. Stokes and Christopher G. Ellison, "Religion and Attitudes Toward Divorce Laws Among U.S. Adults," *Journal of Family Issues* 31, no. 10 (2010): 1279-1304. <http://academic.research.microsoft.com/Search?query=journal%20of%20family%20issues%20stokes%20and%20ellison> (accessed March 18, 2013).

of Latter Day Saints, marriages and divorce are permitted only inside the Church. According to them cancellation of sealing or temple divorce is granted by the highest authority of the Church only in exceptional situations. Civil Divorce or divorce outside the temple is not permitted among this group.

Religion shapes our attitudes toward divorce. What the Bible says about marriage, divorce and remarriage remains a point of contention for Christian denominations. Religious affiliation, a person's view about the Bible, and church attendance influence attitudes towards divorce.⁵⁰ Most Christian denominations discourage divorce according to the belief that divorce and remarriage equate with adultery. Most Christian churches treat divorce negatively and vary in their toleration of divorce. Consequently, they treat divorcées negatively. Church Law often dictates restrictions and treatment of divorcées. Divorcées have been dismissed from churches because of their "sin." Divorcées are subjected to restrictions and conditions that are often not required of fornicators, murders, or other offenders. Such restrictions and conditions include, but are not limited to: (1) cannot remarry or only remarry under certain conditions; (2) cannot serve in roles of influence such as pastors, elders, or deacons; and (3) females have a ceiling. The controversy over divorce is a question of whether interpretations of marriage, divorce and remarriage challenges biblical moral standards or is the church upholding long-held and traditional beliefs that are not biblical? Ending marriages and life partnerships takes place

⁵⁰ Kim Fabricius, comment on "Ten propositions of Karl Barth: Theologian." *Faith and Theology*, November 10, 2006, <http://www.faith-theology.com/2006/11/ten-propositions-on-karl-barth.html> (accessed March 21, 2013).

in a heightened private mode, where cultural strategies support an expectation that one should cultivate a calm rationality to work productively on the self and relationships with others.⁵¹

The state of the Christian doctrine and churches today is such that divorced people migrate across denominational and theological lines in search of congregations that are spiritually and emotionally safe, loving environments.⁵² Pastors and individuals who have listened to divorced people hear them say they feel incredulous, like a failure, hurt, guilt, shame, rejection, embarrassed, broken, jealous and disconnected from their family, friends, church and community. Interaction is often strained; church members are judgmental and uncomfortable around divorcees. Wounded divorced people are often discriminated against. Often, divorced people are the prime group ready to receive and respond to God's word.⁵³

Pastors often preach on solid marriages and healthy relationships. Divorce, however, invades the life of everyone in society. Women in the church are affected just as women out of church. Regardless of the circumstances of the divorced woman, God does not discriminate on either one, a foundational principle of the church. The church has an opportunity to affirm the value of divorced women and serve as an instrument in helping her rise out of the ashes of a potentially devastating life experience.

⁵¹ Jenkins, 278–292.

⁵² Smith, 3.

⁵³ Sherman Nobles, *God is a Divorcé Too!* (Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing, LLC, 2004), 26.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

A primary goal of research is to achieve understanding and then to develop models that approximate "truth" and "reality." This poses serious challenges to social science researchers since truth and reality tend to be socially constructed. In other words, what is meaningful, true and real to one in some situations may not be so for others. The complex, diverse and changing nature of human behavior tends to resist the development of universally applicable models. Qualitative methods, appropriately applied, provide a means of gaining a sympathetic understanding of the complexities of human motivation and social interaction. The theoretical framework provides support for the proposed study by presenting known relationships among variables and setting limits or boundaries for the proposed study.¹

The theoretical framework is a collection of interrelated concepts, like a theory but not necessarily so well worked-out. David A. Roozen presents a framework for defining congregational affiliation. The framework is grounded in the assertion that "individuals affiliate with congregations which are affiliated with denominations; all three shape and are shaped by their social context." Roozen arrays these various

¹ Robert T. Howell, "Qualitative Research Methodologies." *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education Virginia Tech* 34, no. 2 (1997), <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JITE/v34n2/editor.html> (accessed February 12, 2013).

levels of interacting factors in a matrix, graphically demonstrating the complexity of affiliation.”² This is significant because this study seeks to keep individuals integrated and affiliated with congregations.

A theoretical framework guides your research, determining what things you will measure and what statistical relationships you will look for in implementing your study. It can mean the difference between empirically derived content rather than personal, idiosyncratic content.³ This framework should help pastors and spiritual leaders consider how to thoroughly, systematically and creatively implement a divorce support intervention ministry. This is especially significant when the proposed ministry is an intervention that deals with matters of the heart, mind and spirit. There may be an inclination to rush in and do something; however, a framework for a planned intervention provides more consistency. The aim of the framework is to encourage pastors to think purposefully and stay in a state of readiness to serve these individuals.

In implementing the ministry model, the pastor should establish the church’s biblical perspective on divorce and remarriage. There are members in the congregation who surmise the church’s position from sermons, comments, remarks, other members and gossip. The pastor should designate a spiritually strong leadership team, provide facility and funding support and oversee the entire operation. The delivery method is the ongoing support group model. The right leadership team is crucial. The pastor and leadership team are responsible for the content, methods, facility support, funding and operations. The support team is comprised of a secretary, group facilitators, security, childcare providers

² Amy L. Sales and Gary A. Tobin, eds., *Church and Synagogue Affiliation: Theory, Research and Practice* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 15, www.questia.com (accessed April 15, 2013).

³ Alan J. Hawkins, et al., “A Comprehensive Framework for Marriage Education.” *Family Relations* 53, no. 5 (2004): 547-558.

and a publicity team. It is important that the team members have recovered from their own divorce experience and feel called to the ministry.

This model is an inclusive model intended to take into account fallout from divorce-damage. Participation should be open to all races, ethnic groups, socioeconomic levels and religious affiliations (or non-affiliations). Support is extended to divorced individuals, remarried individuals, individuals separated pending divorce, teen and adult children of divorced or separated parents. There are no time restrictions on the divorce. Sheurs, a psychotherapist, reported many instances of individuals damaged by their own religious community (the established church or by sects). They frequently involved people who were deeply and authentically religious, people who had participated intensely in a religious community, which for some reason they had left or from which they had been excluded. Many had devoted a lot of time, love and money to spiritual activities and often-charitable work. The emotional pain was intense. Some of them became alienated from their church but not from their faith. Others lost their faith, became disillusioned and cynical. This had an impact on their psychological state. There was often spiritual trauma lurking behind relational problems. A much-needed support is leaders, preferably from their own religious community. Sheurs provided an example of a former priest who was angry that his church had “not wanted to know” about him after his bout with mental illness.⁴ Divorced individuals sometimes feel this type of rejection.

This study presents a divorce support ministry framework for pastors with the assistance of a ministry team. Meaningful intervention strategies will help divorced individuals stay connected and integrated with the church community. Spiritual healing,

⁴ Agneta Schreurs, *Psychotherapy and Spirituality: Integrating the Spiritual Dimension into Therapeutic Practice* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2002), 3, <http://www.questia.com/read/119659870> (accessed March 6, 2013).

the desired outcome of this study, is restoration by God to wholeness, health and soundness as promised in Psalms 103—He forgives all of our iniquities, sets right and restores us to spiritual wholeness from psychological and emotional trauma. It is spiritual because it comes from God with an abiding peace that surpasses all understanding. This ministry model based on spiritual knowledge of scripture, sound interpretation of doctrine and undergirded by pastoral leadership will help bring spiritual healing to individuals experiencing hurt from divorce. This model implemented with a strong ministry team, paves the way for divorced individuals to recover and integrate fully with a church family.

Biblical Foundation

Old Testament

The Old Testament Foundation explores the verse in (Hosea 2:2) from the perspective of a woman whose husband divorces her. Hosea is the initiator of the divorce and Gomer is receiver of the decision to breakup. In contrast, those who are being left must cope with devastating and sometimes unexpected losses.”⁵ This relationship lends itself to interpretation because of the details provided by Hosea.

Hosea 2:2

Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts.

⁵ Johanna Nauraine, “Women and Divorce,” 2010, <http://www.therepistinchicagil.com/women-and-divorce.html> (accessed March 26, 2013).

With the words “she is not my wife and I am not her husband,” an indissoluble marriage was dissolved and an inviolable covenant has been violated. The impasse in the present case consisted of two simultaneous realities—the wife had decisively left her husband; the husband absolutely refused to relinquish her.⁶ From the wife’s side, the relationship was severed, from the husband’s side it was not. Even though Gomer’s actions were criminal and subject to trial and determination of guilt; the penalty for adultery under Mosaic Code could have been death since Gomer opted out of the marriage.⁷

When discussing the biblical grounds for divorce, there are theologians who discuss the prohibition of divorce based on who initiated the divorce.⁸ In researching the two divorces in this study, information about the circumstances do not necessarily reveal the true initiators of the divorce. Nolland points out that first-century Jewish culture only legally allowed men to divorce women and in certain situations, it was a religious duty for the man to initiate the divorce. He further points out that there were ways that a woman could manipulate a situation to force her husband to initiate a divorce.⁹ There is enough information in Hosea to entertain the possibility that Gomer manipulated the divorce.

The decision to end a relationship can be traumatic, chaotic and filled with contradictory emotions. Johanna Nauraine, in her article *Women and Divorce*, makes an

⁶ Francis I. Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible, Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc. 1980), 123.

⁷ Andersen, 222.

⁸ John Nolland, “The Gospel Prohibition of Divorce: Tradition History and Meaning,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 58 (1995): 19–35.

⁹ Nolland, 19-35.

emotional contrast between those who chose to leave and those who were left. According to Nauraine, “Those who chose to leave difficult or unhappy marriages are frequently confronted with angry and resistant spouses. In contrast, those who are being left must cope with devastating and sometimes unexpected losses.”¹⁰ Sometimes the impulse to fix the past seems as irresistible as it is impossible.¹¹ Individuals may include specific feelings, attitudes and dynamics depending on which one is in the role of the initiator or the receiver of the decision to breakup. For example, it is not unusual for the initiator to experience fear, relief, distance, impatience, resentment, doubt and guilt. Likewise, when a party has not initiated the divorce, the individual may feel a variety of emotions, such as, shock, betrayal and loss of control, victimization, decreased self-esteem, insecurity, anger, a desire to “get even,” and may even wish to reconcile.¹²

The emotions and challenges felt by the initiator and non-initiator are surface from a different perspective. The self-esteem of the non-initiator may be lower.¹³ A divorcee, at best, is often labeled as someone on the fringe of acceptability. At worst, it could mean rejection and complete exclusion.¹⁴ In this pericope, Hosea divorces Gomer. There are always at least two sides to every story. We do not have text, narrative or testimony from Gomer. What we know about Gomer is surmised from Hosea’s exegesis and actions.

¹⁰ Nauraine, “Women and Divorce.”

¹¹ John L. Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs: Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo Through the Reformation* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2001), 222.

¹² Kathleen O'Connell Corcoran, “Psychological and Emotional Aspects of Divorce,” *Mediators and Everything Mediation* (June 1997), <http://www.mediate.com/articles/psych.cfm#stats> (accessed April 10, 2013).

¹³ Nauraine, “Women and Divorce.”

¹⁴ Sherman Nobles, *God is a Divorcé Too!* (Mustang OK: Tate Publishing, LLC, 2004), 26.

John Thompson considers Gomer's story easy to outline because there are so few details. Hosea directs the first oracle to himself:

Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the Lord" (1:2). Gomer was that "wife of harlotry," who bore to Hosea a son, a daughter and another son—prophetically named Jezreel, Not-pitied and Not-my-people. All three names signal impending judgment against Israel, even as the oracle in 1:10-21 goes on to anticipate a time when a repentant nation will again be prosperous, pitied and worthy to be called God's people. Gomer, on the other hand, continues to figure through much of the rest of the book as the unnamed woman and mother who is guilty of harlotry and adultery—a figure of Israel's political, moral and religious infidelities, she is also the target of God's affectionate and vigorous courtship.¹⁵

Thompson goes on to say,

The book of Hosea is a study in contrasts, if not divine mood swings. In Hosea, God is a jealous God. He is a husband who cannot suffer a rival and who berates his wife's foolishness. Yet he is also an affectionate lover: "Behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her" (2:14). At times the prophet's words depict an agonized inner dialogue, a kind of divine bipolarity ... It is clear in Hosea that God is loyal to his people, vehemently so, even when they're as unfaithful as Gomer.¹⁶

David Instone-Brewer offers another scriptural interpretation of the story of Hosea and Gomer. God tells Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman and give their children symbolic names. The marriage ends in divorce as a result of her adulteries. In Hosea 3:1, Hosea is told again to marry an adulterous woman whom he has to purchase from the slave market. It is impossible to determine whether "again" refers to marrying Gomer again, or God addressing Hosea again.¹⁷ Hosea makes it clear that God suffered a

¹⁵ John L. Thompson, *Reading the Bible With the Dead: What You Can Learn from the History of Exegesis That You Can't Learn from Exegesis Alone* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 93–94.

¹⁶ Thompson, 94.

¹⁷ David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 36.

divorce that was forced on Him.¹⁸ Reconciliation anticipates a new relationship as if the old relationship had not occurred.

Renita Weems explains that the metaphor of Israel as a promiscuous wife represents an attempt by the prophets to denounce malfeasance on the part of the ruling elite and to call attention to political greed, moral decay, religious syncretism, social disintegration and egregious national policies.¹⁹ Thompson additionally provides these comments, “Although the metaphor of the unfaithful wife was crafted by the biblical author to indict the apostasy of both sexes in Israel, many readers today find such metaphors less than reassuring about the character of God.”²⁰

In Thompson’s book, he explains the literal-historical (real marriage, real harlotry), the rhetorical (real marriage, staged or parabolic harlotry) and the visionary-metaphorical (no marriage, allegorical harlotry) interpretation of the ideo-story. Readers may read the story as reality or accept it as Hosea’s vision.²¹ Zanchi argues against the literal view because the Levitical prohibition against a priest being married to a harlot (Lev. 21:7) would also apply to a prophet. A literal reading would suggest that God commanded Hosea to transgress divine law. Marrying a harlot would make Hosea “one body” with her thereby making God the author of sin. The opposing argument is that God

¹⁸ Instone-Brewer, 37.

¹⁹ Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 9–10.

²⁰ Thompson, 94–95.

²¹ Thompson, 99–102.

is above the law.²² The researcher approaches the story from the perspective of the visionary-metaphorical point of view.

This paper examines divorce in a patriarchal dominated society where women are not allowed to initiate divorce. In Gomer's situation, her ex-spouse is angry and abusive, yet refuses to sever the relationship completely. Hosea expounds on what he is going to do to Gomer if she does not return to him. Weems calls attention to the fact that Gomer is threatened with physical coercion and violence.²³ Public humiliation, exposure of her body parts to the public looms in the wake of her continued resistance. Not enough information is available regarding custody of the children. The distribution of assets cannot be determined with the information we have. She is also in a situation where Hosea urges the children to rebuke her. The intent of this biblical foundation is to bring to the readers' attention the possibility that Gomer could have been a victim of domestic violence. A number of biblical translations only mention her name once. The research for this section focuses on viewing Gomer experiences from the perspective of a divorced wife.

The Biblical recount of Gomer leaves us to compare much of what we know about life in the Old Testament with what we know about the treatment of wives today. It is unlikely that Gomer arrived at her lot in life without some emotional baggage, anguish and turmoil. The Biblical recount of Gomer provides no details of her history, childhood or family life. There is no evidence of Christian education, good solid family support, upbringing or wholesome friendships. Gomer's name means "completion," as in the

²² John L. Farthing, "Holy Harlotry: Jerome Zanchi and the Exegetical History of Gomer (Hosea 1-3)," *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 292-312.

²³ Weems, 34.

filling up of the measure of idolatry or ripeness of consummate wickedness. Some theologians say she was raised by her father, Diblaim, whose name signifies ‘double layers of grapecakes’ which speaks of one completely given up to sensuality. Others say Diblaim may have been her mother. From Hosea 2:2, we know that Hosea thinks of Gomer as a harlot before he even marries her. Her name came to represent the wholesale adultery and idolatry of the Northern Kingdom.²⁴

In this pericope, the marriage metaphor of Hosea and Gomer (Hosea 1:2-2:3) tells the story of Hosea, per God’s instructions, taking a wife of whoredom and having three children with her. Some interpretations say that Hosea was not the father of all of the children. Even though some interpretations question whether she was a prostitute before her marriage to Hosea, others say she returned to a lifestyle of harlotry during the marriage. Hosea tries threatening her into leaving that lifestyle and returning to him. Following his unsuccessful attempts with threats, he woos her back. Depending on the translation, interpretation or commentary you read, Hosea could possibly be talking to God, never addressing Gomer directly, arguing with Gomer or relating a vision. Disagreement about the nature of Hosea and Gomer’s family narrative is as old as the interpretation of the early Church Fathers.²⁵ Whether it is an allegory or prophetic symbolism, the sole purpose was to get the word of Yahweh known.

Hosea was angry, and Gomer could have been in trouble with civil authorities. Adultery or harlotry was considered one of the most heinous sins in the Bible, punishable by death. Adultery takes its place in the front rank of “the works of the flesh” (Galatians

²⁴ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967), 237.

²⁵ James L. Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1969).

5:19) and is ever against the Creator's just and holy law regarding the welfare of the race (Exodus 20:14).²⁶ Adultery was considered a crime of rebellion and rejection of authority. It threatened a man's claim to paternity possibly destroying the purity of the bloodline creating a threat to the stability of society. Men's honor and status were dependent upon their ability to control women.²⁷

Information about Gomer comes from scrutinizing language translations. The terms prostitution, adultery and harlotry occur frequently in the passages in different translations. These terms are derogatory and were meant to shame Gomer.²⁸ Differences in translations bring into question: Was she married to Hosea when the children were born? Did Hosea buy or hire her back? Did he pay the buyback price to her or a third party? Was she a woman of means?²⁹ The Hebrew language expands possibilities for Gomer's situation. There are distinctions, such as price, that indicate whether the woman is viewed as a commodity.³⁰ The word prostitute signifies a promiscuous woman who is not the property of a man. Language translations and biblical interpretations offer different perspectives on Hosea's relationship with Gomer.

Marriage and family were cherished and sentimentalized in Hebrew patriarchal culture. However, in the Hebrew Bible, humiliating women and mutilating their bodies is associated with God's love for a people. His compassion, commitment, reconciliation —

²⁶ Lockyer, 13-14.

²⁷ Larry J. Kreitzer and Deborah W. Rooke, eds., *Wayward Women and Broken Promises: Ciphers in the Sand: Interpretations of the Woman Taken in Adultery* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 17-52.

²⁸ Julia M. O'Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor: Theology and Ideology in the Prophets* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 31.

²⁹ Walter Vogel, "Hosea's Gift to Gomer," *Biblica* 69 (1988): 412-421.

³⁰ Teresa Hornsby, "Israel has become a Worthless Thing." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 82 (1999): 124-125.

otherwise irresistibly sentimental themes—are associated with battery, infidelity, rape and mutilation of women. Demagogues appeal to sexual images to frame what they have to say about political anarchy and religious idolatry. The prophet Hosea cast portions of his eighth-century commentary in the form of a marital feud between a husband and wife, the former hurling accusations and threats against a wife he perceived to be sexually loose and morally intractable.³¹ The correlation drawn repeatedly in prophetic literature between divine judgment and husbands battering their wives suggests that from the days of biblical writings women in love were women in trouble.³²

Five human relationships are used as metaphors repeatedly in prophetic speeches to describe the relationship between Israel and Yahweh: (1) judge and litigator, (2) parent and child, (3) master and slave, (4) king and vassal and (5) husband and wife.³³ These are metaphors of power. Metaphors of power and punishment not only capture the basis of social relations, they naturalize the ideological framework of those relationships.³⁴ Promiscuity, punishable by loss of property, violence, death and/or divorce posed a threat to social and property codes.

The point of the marriage metaphor . . . is to justify the violence and punishment the subordinate endures and to exonerate the dominant partner from any appearance of being unjust. God, then, is not a harsh, cruel, vindictive husband who threatens and beats his wife simply because he has the power to do so. He is himself a victim, because he

³¹ Weems, 1–2.

³² Weems, 3.

³³ Weems, 44.

³⁴ Weems, 44.

has been driven to extreme measures by a wife who has again and again dishonored him and has disregarded the norms governing marriage relations.³⁵

From the research, Gomer may be an enterprising businesswoman belonging to no man; or, she is an ordinary prostitute without wealth; or, she is a prostitute much like a slave. A more comprehensive overview of Hosea's story is necessary to further understand Gomer's predicament.

In Hebrew, Hosea (the original name of Joshua) means salvation. Hosea's sixty-year ministry lasted from approximately 785-765 B.C. during the reign of seven or eight kings. His ministry was to the adulterous and apostate kingdom of Israel. Adulterous refers to Israel's condition and Apostate refers to Israel's position.³⁶ In relaying God's message to the people, Hosea obviously understands the cultural viewpoint of his audience and uses language intended to arouse, to influence, to inveigh against and to politicize audiences.³⁷ Juxtaposed against the message of redemption, Hosea's message presents God in a compromised position. When Gomer does not respond as Hosea wants initially, he (believing he is God), threatens to strip her naked, humiliate her in front of all her lovers and leave her in the desert to die. He threatens to isolate her, to banish her from his house so that she would be so miserable that she would want to return to him.³⁸

Since she does not acknowledge that God is the giver of the gifts—corn, wine, oil, silver and gold—he threatens to take them all back, again to leave her naked in front of her lovers, humiliated. When Gomer (Israel) claims that the vines and fig trees are the fee that her lovers (clients) have paid for her services, God wants to destroy them. Then, since his threats are useless, he resorts to tenderness. God

³⁵ G.B. Caird and L.D. Hurst, ed. *New Testament Theology*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 19, <http://www.questia.com/read/60256258> (accessed January 14, 2013).

³⁶ Witness Lee, *Life-Study of the Minor Prophets* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry Publisher, 1997), 45–62.

³⁷ Weems, 40.

³⁸ Hornsby, 124–125.

imagines he can woo her, comfort her, appeal to the days of her innocence, before she was such a shrewd woman and could perhaps be outwitted by a manipulative suitor.³⁹

While Hosea may have perceived the messages he delivered as appropriate, the metaphor lends itself to other interpretations. God is not featured as an abusive husband, but rather as a jealous client of a prostitute who desires to possess an autonomous, strong woman.⁴⁰

Hosea could have identified so closely with God that he believed he was God. According to Hosea, God told him to take a wife of whoredom. In researching this study, several interpretations of Hosea's story exist. Gomer is described with prostitute imagery mingled with an aloof indifference to God's manipulations, threats and tenderness.⁴¹ This perspective portrays her as an autonomous, prosperous and independent prostitute (not a victim) who is doggedly pursued by an obsessive and dangerous man who will go to any lengths to possess her. She is able to evade and negotiate her way out of violence and confinement. Hosea reenacts the history of Israel by hiring and confining an independent and successful prostitute.⁴² Another portrayal of this story gives all social and private power to the husband without considering the value of the woman. Her presence evokes such desire that Hosea, positioning himself as God is willing to resort to cruelty,

³⁹ Hornsby, 124–125.

⁴⁰ Hornsby, 125.

⁴¹ T. D. Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea," *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 86–95.

⁴² O'Brien, 65.

lawlessness, even self-humiliation just to control her. In this scenario, Gomer is powerless.⁴³

The researcher thinks the story Hosea is a well-known story of a prophet, who thinks his assignment from God is to marry an adulterous woman. If we totally accept Hosea's characterization of Gomer, certainly Gomer could benefit from a supportive church family. While Hosea is painting a tragic picture of Gomer, he is also presenting an unflattering picture of God. Hosea, while not necessarily an ideal father/husband or role model for the nation, exemplified the characteristics often attributed to prophets. Some interpretations interpret Hosea 2:2 as a domestic argument in front of their children.

Brett Muhlhan identifies two historical markers in the first chapter of Hosea that define the contextual parameters. The first is the introduction of the book that places Hosea ben Beer, as one who is directly addressed by Yahweh during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoshaphat, king of Israel (Hosea 1:1).

This study is not an attempt to negate Hosea ben Beer's prophetic ministry. Here, the researcher examines Hosea's behavior for traits that testify of God's character. God is not a misogynist. He had a genuine interest in restoring Israel. The message is still redemption. The redemptive hope of full restoration transcends Hosea's historical marital situation. It is Yahweh alone who can bring the fulfillment of that vision, hence the abundance of typological inference, reflecting New Testament promise, woven throughout the book of Hosea.⁴⁴ Hosea has been the one directly addressed by Yahweh

⁴³ Hornsby, 119.

⁴⁴ Brett Muhlhan, *A Determined and Subjective Love: Agreeing with Luther's Evangelical Reading of Hosea* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012), 45.

during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Jeroboam. Hosea's marriage to Gomer is referred to as a sign-act that should not take priority over Yahweh. It is God's voice that the book has us to contend with and that voice is jilted, broken hearted and determined to put things right with those who are his people.⁴⁵ For a time, there seemed to have been resurgent prosperity, but Israel was in a state of decay, socially, morally and religiously. Israel was led to believe that Yahweh looked favorably on them, while His word was eclipsed by drunkenness, debauchery and sexual license under the aegis of true religion.⁴⁶ Hosea is the vehicle for God's message.

It is Yahweh who does all the talking and gives all the prediction. Hosea does not actually get to speak until Hosea 3:3. Exegesis must realize a distinction between the children of Hosea in Hos 1:4-9 and the children of Israel, Hosea's brothers and sisters in 2:3. Our textual analysis will reveal greater detail but it is good for us to recognize that this distinction determines the voice in Hos 2. The voice in Hosea 2 is Yahweh's and not Hosea's address to Gomer. It is the mother of Hosea's brothers and sisters that is being addressed by Yahweh, not the mother of Hosea's children.⁴⁷

Muhlhan is careful to make the point that the prophecy, not the marriage, is most important. In the above interpretation, Hosea 2:2 is viewed from the perspective of Yahweh. In Hosea 1:1-2, the Lord is addressing Hosea. The first chapter moves through a progression of address and narrated response. Hosea does not speak, just obeys. God has addressed Hosea and created a sign-act in response to the nature and act of the nation. The children of Hosea's obedience are signs for and against the nation. When the Hebrew text transitions into Hosea 2, it is the voice of Yahweh speaking in a direct monological fashion, in the tone of juridical indictment procedure. God speaks and Hosea listens. The

⁴⁵ Muhlhan, 3.

⁴⁶ John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 270.

⁴⁷ Muhlhan, 6.

mother in Hosea 2:2 is the mother of Hosea's siblings (Israel), not the mother of his two children with Gomer. The mother is the nation of Israel's leadership that was supposed to represent and commend the Mosaic covenant to the people. The point of the marriage sign-act between Hosea and Gomer is to portray Hosea's deep sympathy with Yahweh's struggle. Muhlhan makes the case for examining the Hebrew text and keeping everything in context. He identifies a thread of hope in a concrete historical progression⁴⁸

The Book of Hosea concludes with Israel returning to wholeness. Thus Gomer's name "completion" or "perfection" is descriptive of the Israel imagined by the author of Hosea.⁴⁹ This ideo-story, which has lasted for generations, continues Old Testament policies concerning marriage and adultery. The policies themselves were not necessarily God's instructions about divorce. Biblical support for the study examines biblical and historical exegesis on marriage and divorce. This study examines Old and New Testament scriptures and church practices that impede the integration of individuals who are divorced into full fellowship and acceptance with the church. While God had a divine ideal of marriage, He gave man free will.

Luise Schottroff, in *Women as Followers of Jesus in New Testament Times*, speaks of being able to read and discern different voices embedded in text and different categories of text, such that the voice of the oppressed can still be heard clearly, wary of texts that express the concerns of the dominant forces.⁵⁰ The plight of Gomer and the

⁴⁸ Muhlhan, 81.

⁴⁹ S. B. Reid, ed., *Prophets and Paradigms: Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 79–93.

⁵⁰ Luise Schottroff, "Women as Followers of Jesus in New Testament Times: An exercise in Sociohistorical Exegesis of the Bible," *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*, Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley eds. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 453.

woman caught in adultery is best understood when the social context of the Old Testament is described. Brueggemann, in *Hope Within History*, says God's hopes are profoundly disappointed because God's best hope is an equitable society. Social institutions serve those who are in a position to manage them.⁵¹ The parameters of such a community were established through a variety of provisions regarding "purity" and divine "holiness." These conceptions undergirded priestly legislation, which encompassed sexual, communal and familial matters. The marginalization of women was a part of this scheme.⁵²

Gomer lived during a time of patriarchal reign. Marriage in the Old Testament was a contract between two families and two individuals and included stipulations for severe penalties for certain offenses and financial fines for divorce. Violence against women was typically reported in relation to their sexuality or sexually deemed roles: rape (Genesis 34:2; Judges 5:30; 19:24-25; 2 Samuel 13:14), public humiliation by exposure of genitals (Hosea 2:12; Ezekiel 16:37), ripping open of pregnant women (Amos 1:13; Hosea 14:1), sterility or loss of fertility (2 Samuel 6:23; Hosea 9:14) and the slaughter of mothers alongside their children (Hosea 10:14).⁵³ While laws were constructed around the doings of male heroes, royal figures, warriors, courtiers, priests, shamanistic prophets and rivals, there is an integral role for female figures in the fleshing out of the ideology of kingship and post-exilic royalist agenda. The successes and failures of the kingship in

⁵¹ Walter Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 35.

⁵² Brueggemann, 36.

⁵³ Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 71, <http://www.questia.com/read/119193356> (accessed March 6, 2013).

Israel and Judah were measured by women's lives lived out as tragedies in the face of brutal abuses of male social power. At the risk of risk of bodily harm and danger, the women's expected role was to affirm patriarchal authority. At times, wise women clever enough to side with the right side of the struggle could push the program forward.⁵⁴

The family in Hebrew society was extremely important. During the semi-nomadic days of Israel's history, the life of the family was inevitably connected to the clan and/or the tribe, upon which it depended for protection. When, however, the Israelites became farmers and townsmen, the larger unit was of less importance and the feeling, which held it together, was more difficult to maintain. Settling down in Palestine had the effect of singling out the individual family (as we now know it), based on the father's house; the tribe lost much of its meaning and its break-up was hastened by the deliberate policy of the early kings, who were determined to establish a centralized form of government for the whole country.⁵⁵

The stability of the family was clearly founded on the absolute authority of the father who ruled his wives and children. They married young. It was not uncommon for the father to have two or more wives and a large number of children. The Israelites who were loyal to the religion of Moses married only one wife, in accordance with the ideal made explicit in the teaching of the prophets. It is believed that they would not have described the relationship between God and Israel as a marriage (as Hosea does), if they had recognized polygamy as the normal and legitimate practice. Women were property

⁵⁴ J. David Pleins, "The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible," *The Bible and Interpretation* (2012): 6, <http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/hebrewbible.shtml> (accessed March 6, 2013).

⁵⁵ E. W. Heaton, *Everyday Life in Old Testament Times* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 70 <http://www.questia.com/read/6366872> (accessed March 6, 2013).

and subject to the sovereign will of the patriarch. He could sell his daughters into slavery and have any disobedient children put to death. He could divorce a wife without giving any explanation and without accepting any responsibility for her maintenance. He could not, however, sell his sons, but he could and did arrange their marriages.⁵⁶

According to Heaton, by the strict letter of the law, the status of the Israelite woman could hardly have been worse. Her husband owned her, as he owned his sheep and goats; but he could send her away at a moment's notice. She was unable to inherit property and her plight in widowhood is constantly coupled in the Old Testament with that of the orphans and the poor. However, in most cases, everyday life was more humane than the strict letter of the law. In the family circle, the mother, as well as the father, received the respect and affection of their children. The “proper” wife worked incredibly hard. She was essentially the mother of the sons of the house and this status won for her privileges commensurate with its great responsibilities.⁵⁷ This did not appear to be the situation in Gomer’s case.

Hosea’s efforts to win Gomer back with threats of violence, mistreatment and rejection were unsuccessful. Rejection was total; renewal required submission and compliance to Hosea’s request. We can speculate about Gomer based on Hosea’s monologue. From the monologue, we know that Hosea solicited the children to rebuke their mother; however, we cannot determine who was the primary caregiver for the children. In Hosea 2:14, Gomer’s healing starts when she is wooed in the wilderness and spoken to tenderly. Her wilderness experience becomes a place of healing and restoration.

⁵⁶ Heaton, 71.

⁵⁷Heaton, 72.

New Testament

This section of the Gospel of John relates the story of the woman at the well and is the longest recorded conversation with Jesus in the Bible. In the history of its interpretation, much has been made of this unnamed woman's irregular marital history, but not as much about her witness, her missionary endeavor or Jesus' vindication of her role against the disapproval of male disciples.⁵⁸ Despite the fact that these have been somewhat overlooked, this passage can be studied in order to help understand present day confusion about marriage, divorce and remarriage in biblical times. In this passage of scripture, (John 4:1-42), Jesus addresses the matter of divorce by not making an issue of divorce. He is aware that the woman He meets at the well has had five husbands, but only notes it to let her know that He is omnipotent.

There are many aspects of this story to be examined, such as the place in which it happens, the various exchanges between Jesus and others and the result of the conversations. To begin with, this conversation takes place at an important water source known as Jacob's Well. Jacob's Well is situated on the northeastern foot of Mount Gerizim, southeast of Shechem. The well is situated "near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph" (Gen. 33:18-19; Josh. 24:32) at Sychar, "a city of Samaria" (John 4:5).⁵⁹ First century Jews and Samaritans had been divided by centuries of hostility and deep prejudice. They shared a common heritage, but differed on the sanctity of Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim and legal and scriptural traditions. The Jews considered the Samaritans

⁵⁸ Frances Taylor Gench, *Back to the Well: Women's Encounter with Jesus in the Gospels* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 120.

⁵⁹ Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 547.

heretics, foreigners and unclean.⁶⁰ The Jews further rejected the Samaritans because of their mixed Gentile blood and their style of worship. The Samaritans' worship center was on Mount Gerizim. On this mountain, Samaritans had built a temple that rivaled the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The Samaritan Temple was destroyed by the Jews around 128 B.C.⁶¹ Jews usually avoided Samaria because of the years of feuding; however, Jesus was on a mission.

Resting by Jacob's Well, Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman who had been living a life of habitual immorality. Even if a Samaritan was not living a life of immorality, religious Jews considered Samaritans unclean. The conversation between Jesus and the woman, however, proceeded on two levels, the spiritual and the temporal, with the woman constantly finding excuses for Jesus' probing of her inner world.

Her first shock was that Jesus spoke to her, an act unheard of for that day between a Jewish man and a Samaritan woman. He asked her for a drink of water and then He asked her to go get her husband. Her response, "I have no husband."⁶² Jesus' response to the woman, "You have five husbands and the one whom you now have is not your husband"⁶³ gives us some insight into the woman's personal and community life. She had been divorced more than three times. After experimenting with five husbands (which should not be allegorized), she no longer found the marriage ritual necessary (4:18).

⁶⁰ Gench, 112.

⁶¹ Gerald L. Borchert, "John 1-11," *The New American Commentary*, vol. 25A (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 205-206.

⁶² Borchert, 205-206.

⁶³ Sue Richards and Angie Peters, *Women of the Bible: The Life and Times of Every Woman in the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 2003), 204 -205.

Jewish tradition permitted three husbands, but she obviously had long passed that lenient rule. Based on customs of the time, an assumption can be made that the woman was so hungry for love and a relationship that she welcomed anyone who would have her even though there was no commitment involved.⁶⁴ Her choices led to her living a hopeless, immoral life. Like the Jews, the Samaritans were a moral people who sought to honor God and keep the Old Testament Law. She seemed isolated from normal friendships.

Without sufficient supporting documents, Bible interpreters often attribute the time of day that the woman appeared at the well as an indication of social alienation by the community; however, she could have made several trips to the well or chose to come when it was not so busy.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the time of day that she arrived at the well alone could indicate that she may not have been welcomed by other women in the village. Walking to the well together early in the morning is believed to have been a valued social event for women of that era. The Samaritan woman's appearance alone, at a later hour suggests that she was an outcast.⁶⁶ Following her meeting with Jesus at the well, community relations improved significantly.

The Gospel of John is the only gospel that mentions a ministry of Jesus in Samaria. For that reason, some commentators doubt that Jesus actually carried out a mission in Samaria.⁶⁷ In the interest of presenting different perspectives both literal and symbolic interpretations of the pericope are examined in this chapter.

⁶⁴ Borchert, 205-206.

⁶⁵ Gench, 112.

⁶⁶ Richards, 204-205

⁶⁷ Gench, 111.

In the symbolic context, the Samaritan woman represents a Samaritan presence and voice within the Johannine Christian community. In the literal context, she is an unnamed, despised foreigner with an irregular marital history who encounters Jesus in daylight. That is the story as it actually reads, but there are several symbolic interpretations that might be attributed to this conversation. First of all, there is a possible Old Testament literary connection where several betrothal type scenes “boy meets girl” occur.⁶⁸ At a well in Aram-Naharaim, Abraham’s servant Laban meets Rebekah who becomes Isaac’s wife (Genesis 24). Jacob and Rachel met and became betrothed at the same well (Genesis 29:1-14). The Bible records this as a daylight meeting like the meeting with Jesus and the woman at the well. Moses also meets one of his wives, Zipporah at a well (Genesis 24; 29; Exodus 2). While this story follows the pattern of betrothal scenes in the Old Testament, Jesus does not meet a maiden, but a five-time-married woman. Rather than looking for a wife, Jesus is looking for worshippers. Jesus is invited to the home, but instead of a wife, He finds worshippers.⁶⁹

Another symbolic interpretation, by Lyle Eslinger, presents this text as an attempted seduction on the part of the woman. He discerns this through sexual innuendoes referencing living water, springs, wells and cisterns.⁷⁰ Sandra Schneiders suggests that the use of marital imagery in Israel’s prophetic literature to describe the

⁶⁸ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1981), 50–53.

⁶⁹ Gench, 113.

⁷⁰ Lyle Eslinger, “The Wooing of the Woman at the Well: Jesus, the Reader and Reader-Response Criticism,” *Journal of Literature and Theology* 1 (1987): 167-193.

relationship between Yahweh and the covenant people correlates with Samaria as the New Israel.⁷¹

Further Old Testament connection, in Gench's book, *Back to the Well*, parallels the woman's personal history with the Samaritan national history. According to this interpretation, "the Samaritan woman functions as a spokesperson for her people."⁷² Instead of stating her name, her national identity is given. As further detailed in 2 Kings 17:24ff, "... when the Assyrians conquered the region in 721 B.C.E., they brought colonists from five foreign nations into Samaria. Thus, the woman's five previous husbands may well be symbolic of Samaria's intermarriage with foreign peoples and the acceptance of their false gods."⁷³ Craig Koester suggests that the personal history of the sixth man with whom the woman resides symbolizes Rome under which colonization continued in the first-century or symbolizes the colonial history of Samaria.⁷⁴ Schneiders adds that "cohabitation with a sixth man might refer to the Samaritans' syncretistic worship of Yahweh in the New Testament era, which lacked the full integrity of the covenant relationship."⁷⁵ Schneiders suggests that "the entire dialogue between Jesus and the woman is the 'wooing' of Samaria to full covenant fidelity in the New Israel by Jesus, the New Bridegroom."⁷⁶

⁷¹ Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1991), 187.

⁷² Gench, 114.

⁷³ Gench, 114.

⁷⁴ Craig Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community 2nd Edition* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, Fortress, 2003), 48–49.

⁷⁵ Schneiders, 187.

⁷⁶ Schneiders, 191.

Such a symbolic representation was often made in the Old Testament. The prophets feminized cities and used marriage and sexual imagery in their own way to comment on Israel's social, political and economic policies. Hosea, the prophet concerned with Samaria, is credited with being the first prophet to use the marriage metaphor to describe the history of the relationship between Israel and God.⁷⁷ Gench goes on to point out that if the woman's personal history symbolizes the colonial history of Samaria raises the question of true worship.⁷⁸

The five husbands can be interpreted literally or symbolically, but it is most often interpreted literally. The Samaritan woman's marital history with its sinfulness, her shady past, her dubious morals, her promiscuity and aberrant sexual behavior usually dominates any discussion of her.⁷⁹ John Calvin attributes the five divorces to: (1) being froward and disobedient, (2) sin, (3) prostitution or fornication and (4) talkativeness.⁸⁰ Gail O'Day points out that the Bible does not tell us why the Samaritan woman had five husbands. It does not say if she had been divorced or widowed. Like Tamar in Genesis 38, she may have been trapped in the custom of levirate marriage and the last male in the family line had refused to marry her.⁸¹

Consider another possibility discussed by Linda Bridges. The Samaritan woman started out with two strikes against her. She was first a woman, marginalized in the first-

⁷⁷ Weems, 44-46.

⁷⁸ Gench, 115.

⁷⁹ Gench, 116.

⁸⁰ John Calvin, in "The Samaritan Woman," *Back to the Well: Women's Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels*, ed. Frances Taylor Gench (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 116.

⁸¹ Gail O'Day, "John," *The Women's Bible Commentary*, Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 296.

century, patriarchal culture; and second, she was a Samaritan which made her an outcast in the Jewish society. With these two strikes against her, she was labeled by a rabbinical maxim as a “perpetual menstruant” and perpetual menstruants are forever unclean, unapproachable and unacceptable by God. Maybe her five husbands found her lacking, unsuitable, unlovely, unfit for their desires and they simply rid themselves of any responsibility and relationship. She may have been old and outlived her five husbands.⁸²

Perhaps this so-called “paradigm of sexual excess” is more accurately interpreted as a victim of ancient, oppressive patriarchy. Careful exegesis details that by law only men could divorce women in the ancient world (Deut. 24:1-4). Women were not permitted to divorce men. Later, the rabbis would expound on this marriage code and argue that a man could divorce his wife with any just cause, which could be faulty bread or even the lack of beauty.⁸³

Bridges considers the possibility that the woman could have needed redemption from a series of injustices that were the reason she had five husbands in a culture programmed for male domination.

In the words of Sandra Schneiders, “The portrait of the Samaritan woman has been clouded by considerable interpretative litter . . . he treatment of the Samaritan woman in the history of interpretation is a textbook case of the trivialization, marginalization and even sexual demonization of biblical women.”⁸⁴

The Woman

The real message of Jesus and the woman at the well is often buried under the rhetoric about her five husbands. All too often, divorced women are made to feel shame,

⁸² Linda McKinnish Bridges, “Between Text and Sermon: John 4:5–42,” *Interpretation* 48, no. 2 (1994): 173, <http://www.questia.com/read/IP3-2805454> (accessed March 26, 2013).

⁸³ Bridges, 173.

⁸⁴ Schneiders, 188.

guilt and embarrassment from a well-delivered message about Jesus and the woman at the well. Negative portrayals of the Samaritan woman persist in Christian preaching, teaching and on the airwaves so much that divorced women can get the message from the pulpit that they are losers and loose women. Frances Taylor Gench makes an observation of the prurient and persistent tendency to equate women with sexuality and sin.

One wonders, in fact, if the increasing frequency with which sexuality is featured on public airwaves has impacted homiletical airwaves as well, permitting preachers to go to even bolder lengths in eroticizing her portrait. Recently, for example, I heard a sermon on John 4 in which the preacher burst into a country-and-western song—‘Looking for love in all the wrong places’—lyrics that he took as appropriate commentary on the Samaritan woman’s personal history.⁸⁵

Fred Craddock discusses how the details of her marital history, however brief, have proven fascinating for generations of preachers and teachers, evoking imaginative (and often prurient) speculation about her circumstances and history. He points out that the brighter her nails, the darker her mascara and the shorter her dress, the greater the testimony to the power of the converting word.⁸⁶ These negative, sexualized versions of the woman at the well remind us of the power of perception that is so evident in today’s world. Gossip, sexual innuendoes and tragic marital circumstances are often allowed to define people completely—clouding our perception of their gifts and achievement and dignity as children of God.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Gench, 123.

⁸⁶ Fred B. Craddock, “Living by the Word: The Witness at the Well,” (March 7, 1990), 243. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=7&sid=59c22556-8775-4149-a098-b3ae4eda68d6%40sessionmgr14&hid=23> (accessed April 5, 2013).

⁸⁷ Gench, 133.

Spiritual Healing – Living Water

Spiritual healing occurred for the woman at the well as she was gently, wisely, led to the point where she truly believed Jesus was the Messiah. There were things that did not matter like location, past life, familial or ethnic associations. Things that mattered were truth (facing her spiritual state) and acknowledging the Savior (believing). Of note here, is that spiritual healing and salvation are made possible by dealing with the issues in her life.

Judgmental condemnation was not the pattern of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and it certainly was not the way of Jesus with this woman. He did not send her home with a set of instructions. In order to make it possible for the woman to receive the living water about which Jesus spoke, it was necessary for her to deal with the tragic nature of her sinful life. Therefore, Jesus confronted the woman with her life. When she tried to avoid the issue of a husband (John 4:17), just as she may have sought to avoid coming for water along with the other women, Jesus spelled out clearly her ethical problem.

Although she did not initially comprehend the meaning of His words, the woman was ready to receive what she thought was something to satisfy a physical need. Jesus' next words brought about a conviction of a spiritual need by bringing the matter of personal sin into uncomfortably sharp focus.

'Go, call your husband and come here' (John 4:16). She tried to tactfully evade the issue. "I'm single," she replied in effect (vs. 17). There is in this verbal exchange some skillful use of words. The original term rendered 'husband' can mean either 'man' or 'husband.' Our Lord did not necessarily mean for her to bring, her husband, but for her to bring her 'man.' Not knowing what our Lord knew, she chose to take the term in its technical sense and thus thought she would evade her immorality.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Borchert, 205-206.

Technically, the woman was correct in that she did not have a husband at that time. She had a lover and he was not number one, but number six.⁸⁹ The woman who had not prior interest in spiritual things was ready to receive Jesus' message. The physical has given way to the spiritual. Far better than dwelling on the realities of her moral life!⁹⁰

In an article by Craig S. Farmer, in analyzing the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus, he presents the varying opinions of ancient and medieval theologians, sixteenth-century Protestants commentators, early Reformed and Christian theologians. All of the commentators applaud her conversion and witnessing; however, they disagree about her attitude towards Jesus. The patristic and medieval commentators as well as theologians portray her as polite, friendly and eager to be taught. Reformed exegetes, however, present her as brash, saucy and practically insolent in her conversation with Jesus. They describe her on the literal level in rather unflattering terms, as a hussy who ridicules Jesus. The medieval commentators saw her cooperating with Jesus in the process of her illumination. The Reformed saw her as uncooperative, with no desire to speak with him.⁹¹ Without a doubt, there is a need to rehabilitate her image in text.

Summary

No more failed relationships, no more attacks on her self-esteem, no more an outcast in life, she had tasted of the living water and was preparing to live. Jesus uttered

⁸⁹ Bob Deffinbaugh, "The Manifestation of Messiah to the Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42)," <http://bible.org/seriespage/manifestation-messiah-samaritan-woman-john-41-42> (accessed March 25, 2013).

⁹⁰ Deffinbaugh, *Manifestation of Messiah*.

⁹¹ Agnes B. C. Dunbar, "A Dictionary of Saintly Women vol. 2," *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, David Lyle Jeffrey, ed. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1905), 151.

no words of judgment or condemnation. By directing attention to the woman's irregular marital history, Jesus brings her fact-to-face with her sin and guilt and this self-knowledge prepares her for salvation. Feminist work has directed critical attention to the text's androcentric and patriarchal features. Sandra Schneiders, calls attention to the underlying sexism of a prominent metaphor in the dialogue of John 4—the prophetic tradition's marital metaphor for the covenant relationship. Renita Weems reminds us of the biblical metaphor that governed marriage relationships in the Bible.⁹² “Not only is it based on the model of patriarchal marriage to which male domination and female subordination are intrinsic, but it always casts God as the faithful and forgiving husband and Israel as the faithless and adulterous wife, thereby consolidating the entrenched tendency to divinize men and demonize women.”⁹³ Unlike other examples of this type of encounter, however, the relationship established between Jesus and the woman He meets does not result in betrothal and marriage; rather it concludes in the conversion of the woman and her community to faith in Jesus as the "Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

Theological Foundation

“African American women have rich traditions of faith meanings that inform their lives. These are ordinary theologies that respond to life situations ... these theologies spring from values that life has taught black women.”⁹⁴ Divorce, a life situation demanding a response, has the dual status of civil and biblical regulation. The researcher views biblical regulation as a theological layer requiring African American women to

⁹² Weems, 17.

⁹³ Schneiders, 195.

⁹⁴ Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 47.

views biblical regulation as a theological layer requiring African American women to “dig deeper” for emotional healing. The theological foundation of this study discusses the womanist theology as a source of healing for African American women who are divorced. Womanist theology advances a bold leadership style that creates fresh discursive and practical paradigms and “talks back” to structures, white feminists and black male liberation theologians.⁹⁵

Women are often trained from childhood to be selfless, good and responsible for other people’s happiness. The crisis of divorce or the break-up of a long-term relationship can spark the energy and provide the roadmap to guide women back toward true selfhood.⁹⁶ In the process of healing, it is important to address the mental, emotional and physical challenges that arise upon the breakup of a relationship. Equally important is the necessity to connect with our spiritual self, the soul.⁹⁷ The Womanist theology is rooted in the idea of loving yourself, healing and spirituality. Womanist theologians seeks healing and wholeness to the individual and all mankind. Alice Walker coined the term “womanist” in 1983 in her book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*:

Womanist 1. From “womanish” (opp. of “girlish”). A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children “You acting womanish,” i.e. like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown-up. Being grown-up. Responsible, in charge, serious.

2. A woman who loves other women, sexually and/ or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as

⁹⁵ Bell Hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1988), 172-173.

⁹⁶ Michele Germain, *The Jill Principle: A Woman’s Guide to Healing your Spirit after Divorce or Breakup* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publishing, 2006), 2.

⁹⁷ Germain, 2.

wholeness of the entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for her health. Traditionally universalist, traditionally capable.

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.⁹⁸

The definition above provides significant clues for the development of womanist theology.⁹⁹ The concept contains what black feminist scholar, Bell Hooks, in *From Margin to Center*, refers to as cultural codes. Cultural codes are words, beliefs and behavioral patterns of a people that must be deciphered before meaningful communication can happen cross-culturally.¹⁰⁰ “Walker’s codes are female-centered and they point beyond themselves to conditions, events, meanings and values that have crystallized in the Afro-American community around women’s activity and formed traditions.”¹⁰¹ Categories and methods are necessary to develop along lines consistent with the sources of that theology. Christian womanist theological methodology needs to be informed by at least four elements: (1) a multidialogical intent, (2) a liturgical intent, (3) a didactic intent and (4) a commitment both to reason and to the validity of female imagery and metaphorical language in the construction of theological statements. The resulting theology moves Black women towards self-love and wholeness.

⁹⁸ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publisher, 1983), xi-xii.

⁹⁹ Delores S. Williams, “Womanist Theology: Black Women’s Voices,” *Christianity and Crisis* 47, no. 3 (1987): 66-70, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=445> (accessed March, 27, 2013).

¹⁰⁰ Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 58.

¹⁰¹ Williams, 66-70.

Part three of Walker's definition, "loves the spirit," recognizes a transpersonal presence that has inspired scholars in other disciplines including psychology.¹⁰² Stanislav Grof, considered a founder of transpersonal psychology, defines it as the use of non-ordinary states of consciousness for the purpose of analyzing, healing and obtaining insight into the human psyche.¹⁰³ For this study, the researcher examined transpersonal psychology to postulate the belief that faith in God and spirituality are avenues to healing for divorced women.

In therapy sessions reported by Joan Hamerman, divorced women often related stories of a string of people who ignored their emotional needs.¹⁰⁴ Lillian Comas-Diaz has worked to clearly express the active and liberating role spirituality plays in the lives of women of color, framing it as essential to the development of womanist psychological theory. This approach to psychology entertains the idea that the emotional needs of women of color cannot be met without foregrounding our values and investigating our lived experiences for ignored and discounted wisdom.¹⁰⁵ Walker, a divorcee herself, uses bibliotherapy as therapeutic healing from her own divorce. Two of her narratives, *To My*

¹⁰² Juko Martina Holiday, "The Word the Body and the Kinfolk: The Intersection of Transpersonal Thought with Womanist Approaches to Psychology," *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 29, no. 2 (2010): 103–120.

¹⁰³ Stanislav Grof, "Brief History of Transpersonal Psychology," *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 27 (2008): 46–54.

¹⁰⁴ Joan Hamerman Robbins, *Knowing Herself: Women Tell Their Stories in Psychotherapy* (New York, NY: Plenum Press, 1990), 215, www.questia.com (accessed March 27, 2013).

¹⁰⁵ Lillian Comas-Diaz, "Spirits: Reclaiming Womanist Sacredness Into Feminism," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 32 (2007): 13–21.

Young Husband and *The Way Forward Is with a Broken Heart*, appear to be part of a chain of events that she continues to work through therapeutically via the writing craft.¹⁰⁶

In an article by Juko Martina Holiday, she explains how womanism has been spiritualized and oriented toward healing and wholeness from its inception, making the intersection between womanist and transpersonal thought particularly interesting to her as a transpersonalist, a psychotherapist and a woman of color. Juko, in an effort to intersect and enrich transpersonal and womanists studies, places womanism in a historical context, articulating the values that inform emotional healing from a womanist perspective and examining transpersonal expression in womanist scholarship. She examines the role of word, body and kinfolk in womanist approaches to emotional healing.¹⁰⁷ Word, body and kinfolk (themes from womanist literature) along with lived experiences of women of color resonate with the work of womanist scholars in psychology.¹⁰⁸ Word, body and kinfolk provide strong theoretical roots for the development of therapeutic practices that incorporate (a) recognition of the importance of narrative and testimony as recognized paths to emotional healing, (b) re-possessing and using the body as an ally for the end of suffering and (c) understanding the importance of community and context in the process of restoration.¹⁰⁹ According to Stephanie Mitchem, “Both womanist and transpersonal approaches (a) value lived experience as a valid source of data, (b) challenge paradigms that privilege mainstream assumptions (e.g., regarding the validity of including

¹⁰⁶ Geri Bates, *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 149.

¹⁰⁷ Juko Martina Holiday, 103–120.

¹⁰⁸ Comas-Díaz, 13–21.

¹⁰⁹ Geoffrey Nelson and Isaac Prilleltensky, *Community Psychology: In Pursuit of Liberation and Well-being* (Basingstoke Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 245.

spirituality in psychology or the study of entheogens) and (c) offer empowering contexts for experiences that are often pathologized."¹¹⁰

Transpersonalists and womanists both honor transcendent and spiritual experience (often accepted by the church and not stigmatized by the community) and counter western psychological perspectives that dismiss the narrative of lived experience. With the womanists and transpersonalists, the narrative and testimony are factored into the healing process. Mitchem and Anzaldúa describe a testimony in church:

A weeping member of the congregation in need of prayer or a recently converted sinner would stand, walk to the front of the sanctuary, then turn to the assembly to give her testimony. Testimony might include references to how bad things were (or how bad things are), how she was sitting and wondering how she was going to get the light bill or the car note paid. She might speak of some trouble at home or of her struggle with illness or disease. As she shares her burdens, she is encouraged and supported by the voices and the presence of those listening.¹¹¹

From here, the story flows to her direct personal experience of God's grace and providing. She may quote from scripture, from the book of Matthew, reminding herself and all those who listen that God is aware of every sparrow that falls from the sky. She speaks to the power of a God who "makes a way out of no way," has blessed her before and always brought her through. The purpose of testimony is to risk baring it all and having it witnessed. It provides a personal account of faith that is superior to circumstance. The testimony is a path to healing, a soul-witness account of what is possible. The audible response of those listening is a means of building an alliance with the person sharing the story, inviting catharsis, connection and healing for the church community. Redeeming painful experience through testimony transforms those events "into something valuable, *algo para compartir* [something to]...share with others so they may also be empowered."¹¹²

Listeners or witnesses to narratives and testimonies often receive what they need for personal healing. The process of weaving one's own story is a way of reclaiming oneself

¹¹⁰ Holiday, 105.

¹¹¹ Holiday, 113.

¹¹² G. E. Anzaldúa and A. Keating, eds., *This Bridge we Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (New York, NY: Routledge Publishing, 2002), 540.

and releasing internal burdens; the process of telling stories is a way of experiencing union with those who witness them.¹¹³

If womanist theological method is informed by a liturgical intent, then womanist theology will be relevant to (and will reflect) the thought, worship and action of the black church. But a liturgical intent will also allow womanist theology to challenge the thought/worship/action of the Black Church with the discordant and prophetic messages emerging from womanist participation in multidialogics. This means that womanist theology will consciously impact critically upon the foundations of liturgy, challenging the church to use justice principles to select the sources that will shape the content of liturgy. This source needs to portray blackness or darkness, women and economic justice for nonruling-class people. A negative portrayal demands omission of the source or its radical reformation by the Black Church. The Bible, a major source in black church liturgy, must also be subjected to the scrutiny of justice principles.¹¹⁴

Historically, the Black Church has been a source of hope and strength for the African American community.¹¹⁵ A hierarchal system of control, referred to as the “God-head hierarchy” has been prominent in the interpretation of women’s roles in the family and church. God is the head of all, man answers to God and woman answers to man. Because of this belief, some divorced women struggled with the “appropriateness” of divorce; subsequently, they submitted to and accepted inappropriate behavior and

¹¹³ Holiday, 113.

¹¹⁴ Williams, 67.

¹¹⁵ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 276.

extended marriages longer than their viable life.¹¹⁶ Divorce represented an additional emotional and spiritual-level conflict for African American women who aligned themselves with the God-head hierarchy. When an African American woman influenced by the Black Church is faced with divorce, she engages in a mental conflict as she attempts to answer to God, man and her community.

God and Womanist Theology

Regardless of one's hopes about intentionality and womanist theological method, the God-content of womanist theology is important. Walker's mention of the black womanists' love of the spirit is a true reflection of the great respect Afro-American women has always shown for the presence and work of the spirit. In the black church, women (and men) often judge the effectiveness of the worship service not on the scholarly content of the sermon, neither on the ritual, or the orderly process. Rather, worship has been effective if "the spirit was high," i.e., if the spirit was actively and obviously present in a balanced blend of prayer, of cadenced word (the sermon) and of syncopated music ministering to the pain of the people.¹¹⁷

The importance of this emphasis upon the spirit is that it allows Christian womanist theologians, in their use of the Bible, to identify and reflect upon those biblical stories in which poor oppressed women had a special encounter with divine emissaries of God, like the spirit. In the Hebrew Testament, Renita Weems uses Hagar's story to illustrate the relevance of African American women's experience of bondage, of African

¹¹⁶ Diedra RochelleTurner, "Religion and Womanism in the Lives of Central Texas African American Baptist Women," diss., Texas A&M, August 2007, <http://repository.tamu.edu/bitstream/handle/1969/57>.

¹¹⁷ Williams, 68.

heritage, of an encounter with God/emissary in the midst of fierce survival struggles. Katie Cannon, among a number of black female preachers and ethicists, urges black Christian women to regard themselves as Hagar's sisters.¹¹⁸

In the New Testament, the Christian womanist theologians can refocus the salvation story so that it emphasizes the beginning of revelation with the spirit mounting Mary, a woman of the poor: " . . . the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee (Luke 1:35)." Such an interpretation of revelation has roots in nineteenth-century black abolitionist and feminist, Sojourner Truth. Posing an important question and response, she refuted a white preacher's claim that women could not have rights equal to men's because Christ was not a woman. Truth asked, "Whar did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothin' to do wid Him!"¹¹⁹ This suggests that womanist theology could eventually speak of God in a well-developed theology of the spirit. Harriet Tubman often "went into the spirit" before her liberation missions and claimed her strength for liberation activity came from this way of meeting God. Womanist theology has grounds for shaping a theology of the spirit informed by black women's political action.

Emotional and spiritual healing for divorced women is influenced by the individual's belief in God. What they believe about God is influenced by their past. Walker's way of connecting womanists with the spirit is only one clue. The integrity of black churchwomen's faith, their love of Jesus, their commitment to life, love, family and politics will also yield vital clues. And other theological voices (black liberation,

¹¹⁸ Williams, 68.

¹¹⁹ Williams, 69.

feminist, Islamic, Asian, Hispanic, African, Jewish and Western white male traditional) will provide insights relevant for the construction of the God-content of womanist theology.¹²⁰

Womanist theologians add their own special accent to the understandings of God emerging from womanist theology. But if one needs a final image to describe women coming together to shape the enterprise, Bess B. Johnson in *God's Fierce Whimsy*, offers an appropriate one. Describing the difference between the play of male and female children in the black community where she developed. Johnson says,

The boys in the neighborhood had this game with rope . . . tug-o'-war . . . till finally some side would jerk the rope away from the others, who'd fall down. . . . Girls weren't allowed to play with them in this tug-o'-war; so we figured out how to make our own rope . . . out of little dandelions. You just keep adding them, one to another and you can go on and on. . . . Anybody, even the boys, could join us. . . . The whole purpose of our game was to create this dandelion chain—that was it. And we'd keep going, creating till our mamas called us home.¹²¹

Inclusiveness is a concept of womanism that often starts during childhood. The second part of Walker's definition emphasizes the community, both locally and globally when it mentions commitment to the survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female and "traditionally universalist."

A simple definition of womanist theology is the systematic, faith-based, exploration of the many facets of African American women's religiosity. Womanist theology is based on the complex realities of black women's lives. Womanists' theologians recognize and name the imagination and initiative that African American

¹²⁰ Williams, 68-69.

¹²¹ Holiday, 103-120.

women have utilized in developing sophisticated religious responses to their lives.¹²²

Womanist theology acknowledges the concept of lives as “texts.” From a womanist perspective, healing incorporates spirituality. Stephanie Mitchem explains,

Spirituality is the culmination of everything we do and its impact . . . it is really part of the foundation of what we are . . . so, it is an imperative to begin with black women’s lives as texts, celebrating and validating their own selves. Viewed as “texts,” human lives require interpretation of their times.¹²³

Stephanie Mitchem discusses the lived theologies of individual black women that cannot be dismissed as the empty activities of the ignorant. Womanist theologians recognize the richness of black women’s communal expressions of theology. These lived theologies become part of the womanist theological texts.¹²⁴ Within the framework of womanist theology exist “ordinary” theologies with faith as the core or focal point. Mitchem explains that, “Faith, for black women, becomes a self-defining center that resists socially constructed stereotypes. ‘God is able’ is both a battle cry and a statement of faith.”¹²⁵ Many testimonies attribute survival and positive outcomes to faith. Howard Thurman wrote in a 1947 essay, “Religious faith taught a people how to ride high to life, to look squarely in the face of those that argue most dramatically against all hope.”¹²⁶ In the words of Stephanie Mitchem, “Faith and prayer in black communities have formed creative, contrary people who take religion seriously.”¹²⁷ According to Mitchem,

¹²² Mitchem, 46.

¹²³ Mitchem, 47.

¹²⁴ Mitchem, 49.

¹²⁵ Mitchem, 46–49.

¹²⁶ Mitchem, 54.

¹²⁷ Mitchem, 54.

“Ordinary theologies are deeply felt and involve women’s daily practices that may come from the tradition of organized religions or folkways.

Two religious practices with the capacity to empower are ‘reading signs’ and ‘going to the water’ as a place of prayer and meditation.”¹²⁸ Similarities exist between “going to the water” and the “water” Jesus offers the woman at the well. In the Greek text, Jesus offers the woman at the well everlasting water. When Jesus was pierced in his side as He hung on the cross, blood and water came out. “Going to the water” is to move towards life and healing. The water that Jesus offered the Samaritan woman at the well is not a literal drink, but the life-giving gift of the indwelling, presence of God by the Spirit, Who produces a continual refreshing and sustaining source of strength and blessing (vs. 14; cf. John 7:37-39).¹²⁹ However, water sometimes symbolizes life. These places of meditation, especially “going to the water,” undergird a sense of safety, power and spirituality, which is an important part of the healing process for women dealing with divorce. Ironically, differences exist between the reference to “wilderness” in womanist theology and “wilderness” in Hosea 2:14-15. Hosea leads Gomer to the wilderness, “I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will respond as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt (NIV).” The commonality between “wilderness” in womanist theology and “wilderness” in the book of Hosea is hope that brings an individual to a better place in life.

¹²⁸ Mitchem, 48.

¹²⁹ Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 60.

When we read that God has made the “Valley of Achor a door of hope” it is no small thing. He will take Israel from a place where they deserve to be stoned because of idolatry, sexual immorality, false worship and wicked hearts to a place where hope is all they see.¹³⁰ “Hope” in the Bible is a much stronger word than in our normal English use. In the Bible, both the Old Testament Hebrew word, TiQWH and the New Testament Greek word, Elpis, carry the meaning not only of desirability, but also of assurance. “Hope” in the Bible means absolute guarantee of something desirable to come about in the future.¹³¹ Allen C. Meyers defines “hope” as confident expectation, ranging in degree from an ordinary desire felt with eager anticipation to a defining characteristic of those who seek God and experience his grace. In the theological sense, hope is a virtue constitutive of God’s people, both Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament.¹³²

“When confronting the grief of divorce or breakup, depression is the normal and debilitating response to loss. Emotions associated with depression include a sense of hopelessness and despair along with a reduced state of vitality and a lack of motivation.”¹³³ The third part of the womanist definition is: loves herself, loves dance, loves the spirit, loves love and food and roundness, loves struggle, loves the folk, loves herself regardless. When hope and community escape, divorced women may experience severe depression and despair which Paul Tillich names and Delores Williams relates to,

¹³⁰ James Pruch, “Out of the Valley of Achor into a Door of Hope,” *Beneath the Cross* (2008) <http://jamespruch.wordpress.com/2008/09/14/out-of-the-valley-of-achor-into-a-door-of-hope/> (accessed March 15, 2013).

¹³¹ Myers, 500.

¹³² Myers, 500.

¹³³ Germain, 56.

as a feeling of “nonbeing” that can lead to personal annihilation, loss of personal meaning and purpose. The feeling of “nonbeing” positions an individual for two types of anxiety: (1) anxiety of meaninglessness and (2) anxiety of condemnation. Anxiety of meaninglessness impinges upon our spiritual affirmation. In the case of anxiety, our moral self-affirmation is tried by guilt and condemnation. Paul Tillich call “existential estrangement.” Short of a “way out,” the end result is suffering and aloneness. Paul Tillich’s influence is shown especially through Williams’ admiration for his desire to construct a socially relevant theology and the “courage to be” which defines his response to the trials and tribulations of individual and social human life. These are themes that underscore Williams’ constructive theology of culture that provided womanist theology with its authoritative and defining initial forays into systematic theology.¹³⁴ Williams calls on the Black Church to participate and expand its role in “bringing social salvation to the suffering and violated ones. The real individual sin is not to embrace the courage to be (push through).¹³⁵ An individual’s spirit, comfort, health and groundedness are affected. Williams calls this spiritual desolation or a wilderness experience where they suffer a profound emptiness, a sense of being lost in shadows.¹³⁶ According to Williams,

The end result of such unchecked anxieties leads to despair, whereby a being is aware of itself as unable to affirm itself because of the power of nonbeing. Our spiritual being is a threat to our whole being. When women refer to a ‘wilderness experience,’ they are depicting a place of desolation, ‘where one is exhausted and needs an infusion of faith, a shower of God’s grace. . . . and when confronted with this ‘near-destruction situation’ of the wilderness experience . . . God gives

¹³⁴ Stephen Butler Murray, “Socially Relevant Theology and the Courage to Be: The Influence of Paul Tillich on the Womanist Theology of Delores S. Williams,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 58, no. 3-4 (2004): 95–111.

¹³⁵ Murray, 95-111.

¹³⁶ Delores S. Williams, “Way Out Yonder, Longing for Home,” *The Other Side* 32 (1996): 33.

personal direction to the believer and thereby helps her make a way out of what she thought was no way.”¹³⁷

The womanist perspective on divorce has not been addressed as an isolated component of this theological framework; however, it generalizes a need to identify God’s presence and guidance during this wilderness experience of divorce for African American women.

Historical Foundation

There is much postulation about what God has said in the Bible about divorce and remarriage. This historical foundation traces the history of what is commonly known today as the traditional Christian doctrine of divorce and remarriage. According to David Instone-Brewer, the traditional view of divorce is that Jesus forbade all divorce except in the case of adultery and that he forbade all remarriage. This view can be traced through the Church Fathers, Church canon law and the writings of the Reformers. It was towards easier annulment and the other towards easier divorce. In general, however, divorce was possible only for the very rich or influential.¹³⁸ To effectively discuss divorce and remarriage in the Bible, the researcher will start by explaining marriage as a covenant relationship and adultery as the all-important link between divorce and remarriage.

In David Instone-Brewer’s book, marriage in the Old Testament is defined as a “covenant,” which was the ancient Near Eastern term for any kind of binding agreement or contract. So, the interpretation of marriage as a contract could be the correct term for marriage agreement in the Old Testament. The term covenant evolved to mean something

¹³⁷ Williams, 33.

¹³⁸ Instone-Brewer, 238.

separate from legal restraints. Like any other contract, the marriage contract was an agreement with penalties for breaking the agreement. The penalty for breaking the marriage contract was divorce with loss of the dowry.¹³⁹ Marriage in the ancient Near East was contractual, involving payments, agreed stipulations and penalties. If either partner broke the stipulations of the contract, the innocent partner could opt for a divorce and keep the dowry. Exact parallels to these practices are found in the Pentateuch.

The words “covenant” and “contract” are interchangeable as the Near Eastern term, covenant, a more relational word, is most often used with marriage.¹⁴⁰ Instone-Brewer further includes in his book, “the phrase ‘marriage covenant’ was the constant and normative phrase used to describe the legal framework of marriage in the Old Testament and in its surrounding cultures.”¹⁴¹ However, other theologians, such as Andrew Cornes, does not accept ‘marriage covenant’ as a Biblical term because it is not used in the New Testament.¹⁴² The term “covenant” as a relational word seems to imply a stronger personal commitment. In the event of marriage vows made in religious ceremonies, a divorced woman may experience deeper feelings of guilt if she perceives the marriage as a covenant.

¹³⁹ Instone-Brewer, 19.

¹⁴⁰ Nobles, 49.

¹⁴¹ Instone-Brewer, 3.

¹⁴² Andrew Cornes, *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 164-165.

Sherman Nobles describes God's vision for marriage as the "divine ideal."¹⁴³ John Nolland speaks of Jesus' desire for no divorces as "a moral vision."¹⁴⁴ Marriage, first instituted by God in the Garden of Eden, is described as a union where "... a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). In Exodus 20:14, the Lord unveils the Ten Commandments to the Israelites providing further instruction as to how individuals should think and behave. In regards to the union of marriage, the Ten Commandments instruct those who are married, "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

A constant throughout the history of marriage, divorce and remarriage is "adultery." At the heart of the issue of divorce and remarriage is the adultery, sometimes used interchangeably with the word harlotry and always (in the scriptures) referring to women. In most instances, the discourse on adultery in the Bible was intended to conjure up images of women's bodies and defilement, intimacy and power, violence and control, female nakedness and shame, dread and eroticism.¹⁴⁵ It was considered such a horrific sin that the penalty for individuals accused of adultery or harlotry could be death. On the list of the Ten Commandments, thou shalt not commit adultery is below thou shalt not kill and above thou shalt not steal; yet, neither of those commandments generate the dissonance generated by the seventh commandment. The seventh commandment was not specific to women.

¹⁴³ Nobles, 35.

¹⁴⁴ John Nolland, "The Gospel Prohibition of Divorce: Tradition History and Meaning," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 58 (1995): 24.

¹⁴⁵ Weems, 6.

Old Testament

Sherman Nobles discusses Moses' establishment of civil and religious authority structures for the nation of Israel; however, marriage, divorce and remarriage were considered domestic affairs with very little civil or religious oversight. He established a few limited civil laws concerning marriage, divorce and remarriage and had difficult issues and heated domestic disagreements brought before civil authorities, not priests.¹⁴⁶ It is significant to note that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the church unjustly usurped authority (not given by God) from the civil government. The researcher considers this significant because some of the things attributed to God were actions of the church alone. Only one specific case involving the law of jealousy (Numbers 5:11-31) required involvement of the priesthood.¹⁴⁷

The Loss of Jewish Teaching in 70 C.E.

There was a religious and cultural shift in the Church. David Instone-Brewer reports the change in his book *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context*,

The Early Church lost touch with its Jewish roots in or before 70 C.E. Various passages in the NT suggest that Christians were excommunicated from the synagogue before the NT canon was completed and certainly before 70 C.E. This marked the beginning of the loss of Jewish culture within the Church. A few Christian groups such as the Nazarenes and Ebionites continued to follow Jewish customs, but these soon died out. The Church very quickly forgot its Jewish roots and thereby lost contact with much of the Jewish background of the NT writings.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Nobles, 79.

¹⁴⁷ Nobles, 81.

¹⁴⁸ Instone-Brewer, 239.

The date of 70 C.E. was also very significant for Jews because the destruction of Jerusalem at this time marked a complete break with many aspects of Jewish culture. Post-70 Judaism contained almost no Sadducees or Shammaites and their teachings became a historical curiosity. The academy of rabbis that was set up at Yamnia became the authoritative voice in Judaism for all matters of law and custom. This academy and the Babylonian academy both followed Hillelite teachings and developed it into the Amoraic teaching represented today by the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, respectively. Although the Talmuds contain many traditions about the Sadducees and Shammaites, they are seen almost completely from the point of view of the Hillelite Pharisees. Virtually all that we know about these groups is represented as debates that they had with Hillelites, in which they almost always lost, according to these Hillelite sources."¹⁴⁹

Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, there were differing positions regarding “matter of indecency” and “any matter” as grounds for divorce. The Sadducees and Shammaites’ presence and influence no longer existed after the destruction of Jerusalem. This ended “a matter of indecency” and “any matter” as grounds for divorce. The researcher mentions this because of an inferred reference to “no fault” divorces today. Following the absence of the Sadducees and Shammaites, “any matter” was sufficient grounds for a divorce. A “matter of indecency” and “any matter” as grounds for divorce were known and debated by scholars but not by ordinary Jews.¹⁵⁰ According to Brewer,

Jesus' teaching about divorce was now utterly incomprehensible to Christians, as well as to most Jews. Christians were no longer familiar with the terms "any matter" and "matter of indecency" that formed the basis of Jesus' debate with the Pharisees. Christians were ignorant of these phrases both because of their separation from Judaism in general and because most Jews were themselves now ignorant of these terms. Mark's account, which did not mention these phrases because they were so well known, could not be understood at all after 70 C.E. Matthew, writing a little later than Mark, reinserted these phrases, presumably because he thought that the ordinary Christian might not immediately recognize that they were the subject of the debate. Yet even Matthew's account became incomprehensible once the meaning of these phrases was forgotten by Christians. The Church's struggle to understand Jesus' teaching is seen in the large number of

¹⁴⁹ Instone-Brewer, 239.

¹⁵⁰ Instone-Brewer, 239.

variants in the Gospel texts and in the wide variety of interpretations in the Early Church.¹⁵¹

The Church Fathers

David Instone-Brewer in his book *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* discusses the teachings and decisions on marriage and divorce of fourteen Church Fathers writing from 100 C.E. through 400 C.E. The Church Fathers included Hermas, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Irenaeus, Ptolemaeus, Ambrosiaster, Jerome and Chrysostom (350-410 C.C.), Epiphanius (early fifth century) and Augustine (390 C.E.–14th Century). The Church Fathers generally approached the Gospel traditions about divorce in a straightforward way and their view concurred with the ascetic movement in the Early Church. The Church Fathers had no information about the Jewish background to Jesus' divorce debate with the Pharisees; and, almost universally interpreted the text to say that it is wrong to divorce, except in the case of adultery and that it is wrong to remarry for any reason. They gradually developed the idea that marriage is indissoluble and the Catholic Church carried on this view right up to the present, though it has developed a flexible, easy approach to annulment. However, this still left plenty of room for uncertainty about details."¹⁵²

The writings of Church Father Tertullian, St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, Pope Gregory and Origen Adamantius (some of whom may have met some of the apostles), who lived and wrote after the times of Jesus, clearly demonstrated the severity of the offense in the Old and New Testament. What they shared in common was distain for sex

¹⁵¹ Instone-Brewer, 239.

¹⁵² Instone-Brewer, 240.

or pleasure from sexual intercourse. Throughout the Middle “Dark” Ages, sexual intercourse was commonly thought to be evil, in and of itself, in and out of marriage.¹⁵³ “Many of the Fathers regarded singleness or celibacy as preferable to the married state, though they acknowledged that marriage did not involve sin. The Fathers had little incentive to seek ways to help divorcés remarry and they were happy to recommend the separation of marriage partners rather than divorce. Some, like Athenagoras and Tertullian, even used Jesus’ teaching on remarriage to encourage celibacy.”¹⁵⁴ These were opinions of men, not necessarily what Jesus meant.

Interpretations after the Reformation

During the era of Reformation, the reappraisal of divorce and remarriage resulted in a break with a fresh examination of scripture, a break with traditional authority, a reappraisal of Christian doctrines and a wide diversity of interpretations, all of which were considered to be biblically based. Instone-Brewer continues, “It was clear to most theologians that there was something wrong with the traditional approach. The doubts that had been expressed by Origen and Augustine could now be explored without the straitjacket of orthodoxy. However, the knowledge of the first-century background was still not available and so it is not surprising that none of the ingenious solutions rang true.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Nobles, 62.

¹⁵⁴ Instone-Brewer, 257.

¹⁵⁵ Instone-Brewer, 259.

Erasmus, extolled as one of the clearest thinkers among the new biblical scholars, published his influential Greek New Testament in 1516, which attempted to interpret divorce texts in the context in which they occurred. Of particular importance was his message on "marriage as a sacrament." Violation of a sacrament is an unforgiveable sin. He pointed out that the Roman Catholic concept of marriage as a sacrament was based on the Vulgate translation of Ephesians 5:32 as *sacramentum*. This translation made sense in the early centuries, when *sacramentum* had the broader sense of "symbol" or "mystery," but by the Middle Ages the meaning had narrowed to the technical theological meaning of an immutable means of grace.¹⁵⁶ However, the Reformers rejected indissolubility as a doctrine that was based on the same Vulgate translation *sacramentum* in Ephesians 5:32.¹⁵⁷

Erasmus suggested that the divorce saying of Matthew 5:32 should be interpreted less legalistically, in line with the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. He suggested that the sayings in Matthew 19 and Mark 10 were addressed to disciples who represented truly committed members of the kingdom, rather than to ordinary, imperfect ones. At the time of the Reformation virtually every member of the country was counted as a member of the kingdom and it was difficult to apply these ideal regulations to a very imperfect society. He also pointed out neither of the proof texts that were used for demonstrating that marriage ended only with death (i.e., Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39) were actually dealing with divorce. He concluded that Paul allowed divorce with remarriage after desertion by an unbeliever and that Jesus' exception allowed remarriage after divorce for adultery.¹⁵⁸

Luther and others said that adultery was punishable by death and thus the marriage had already ended in God's eyes. Calvin said that the desertion by a nonbeliever had already

¹⁵⁶ Instone-Brewer, 259.

¹⁵⁷ Instone-Brewer, 259.

¹⁵⁸ David L. Smith, "Divorce and Remarriage from the Early Church to John Wesley," *Trinity Journal* 11, no. 2 (1990): 131-142 (accessed April 13, 2013).

caused a divorce with God and so the marriage had already ended when the believer carried out the divorce.¹⁵⁹

During the time of Christ, there were two predominant rabbinical schools of thought concerning divorce legislation. Both accepted the viability of divorce and numerous legitimate and morally acceptable reasons for divorce; but, they differed significantly concerning divorce philosophy and procedures based on their respective interpretations of Deuteronomy 24:1. Two rabbis, Shammai and Hillel, directed the work of the Sanhedrin. Shammai was known for being stern, stringent and legalistic. Hillel was a man of the people, having a reputation for being humble and patient.¹⁶⁰

New Testament

Regulation of marriage, divorce and remarriage in the New Testament was based on several scriptures in Matthew, Mark, Luke and Corinthians. The passages are used to uphold religious positions on the insolubility of marriage and marriage as a sacrament. Once married, always married in the eyes of God complicates divorce. At face value, “let no man put asunder” acknowledges that man is able to govern divorce, not that it is impossible for man to do so. Sherman Nobles offers a sardonic overview of our predicament as we sort through the biblical text:

If you had a “scriptural” divorce, you might be able to marry again, if you can find a minister willing to perform the wedding ceremony. If you had an “unscriptural” divorce and you have remarried, I’m sorry, but God does not recognize your marriage and you are living in adultery. In fact, you are still married to your former spouse “in the eyes of God.” In order to get right with God, you need to divorce your current spouse and either live celibate the remainder of your life, or remarry your former spouse if possible. If you caused

¹⁵⁹ Instone-Brewer, 267.

¹⁶⁰ Nobles, 131-132.

your first divorce because of adultery, you're "up the creek without a paddle" and relegated to a life of celibacy as punishment for your sins. If your spouse divorces you for unscriptural reasons, you too must live celibate the remainder of your life because of his/her sin. If you have children and fit one of the cases where you must remain celibate, I'm sorry, but your children are relegated to living in a single parent home because of your sin and/or the sin of your spouse.¹⁶¹

Differing biblical interpretations have historically kept sincere Christians in limbo, sometimes experiencing some form of bondage (mental, emotional, spiritual and/or relational) trying to decipher the Word of God.¹⁶²

During Jesus' time on earth, the Pharisees, a Jewish sect, were the largest and held significant political and religious influence in Israel. They ruled as civil judges through the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court and as rabbis, being respected religious teachers. A smaller group, the Sadducees held the highest positions as priests. The Sadducees were secular in their approach to religion and life; they were favored by the Romans and considered themselves the aristocracy of Israel. The Sadducees rejected Oral Law as inspired or authority, only accepting the Written Law as obligatory. They disappeared from history after the destruction of the Temple. On the other hand, the Pharisees considered the Oral Law as obligatory. They believed that the Oral Law was passed down from Moses from one generation of rabbis (sages) to the next by word of mouth. The Oral Law was known as the Traditions of the Elders. Even today, it is taught that the Written Law cannot be understood without the Oral Law. The Oral Law was an explanation, meant to be fluid, in the practical application and meaning of the Written Law, remaining verbal from generation to generation.

¹⁶¹ Nobles, 24.

¹⁶² Nobles, 18.

The Sanhedrin was the central legal institution of the Jewish people. During the oppressive rule of the Roman Empire, Rabbi Yehudah recorded what the Sanhedrins could remember and it became known as the Mishna. Over the next hundred years, rabbis in Israel and Babylon recorded their discussions about the Mishna, resulting in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds. The Babylonian Talmud was used by Noble to explain the cultural context of what Jesus said and did based on the Babylonian Talmud. Matthew 23 records Jesus' disapproval of the Pharisees system of legalism. There was an ideological, moral and spiritual disconnect between Jesus and the Pharisees.¹⁶³

Divorce in the United States

In tracing the historical foundation for divorce and remarriage, the impact of Old and New biblical interpretations are evident in some current laws. There is a significant challenge for civil and religious systems to regulate marriage, divorce and remarriage. While there is clearly supposed to be a separation of religion and state, biblical beliefs underpin major civil decisions.

In the nineteenth century, government responded favorably to pressure from the middle class for less expensive divorces, for grounds other than adultery (i.e., cruelty, desertion, insanity, or a long term of imprisonment), which would become “matrimonial offenses” for which the innocent partner could sue for divorce. These grounds were introduced in The Matrimonial Causes Act 1937. Adultery was still the most common ground for divorce even when both parties wanted a divorce. When both partners wanted a divorce but neither had committed an offense, adultery was often manufactured—one party (usually the husband) would get a hotel room, a woman and a private detective with

¹⁶³ Nobles, 129–130.

a cameraman who would “discover” the adulterer and provide evidence for the court. In response to this contrived offense, the Anglican Church report *Putting Asunder* recommended that the principle of “irretrievable breakdown” of marriage should supplant the concept of “matrimonial offenses.” The resulting outcome was that “irretrievable breakdown” of marriage evidenced by adultery, intolerable behavior, desertion for two years, separation for two years or separation for five years if one party contests the divorce was implemented in the Divorce Reform Act 1969. The Family Law Act of 1996 still recognized “irretrievable breakdown” as the sole ground for divorce but removed the need to prove it in an effort to make divorce less litigious. It also introduced compulsory counseling and additional cooling-off periods. However, this reform was found to be unworkable and the act was withdrawn before it was fully implemented.

Until 1969, the United States was trending towards a bewildering number of possible grounds for divorce because each state had its own laws. Donald W. Shaner estimated that there were more than thirty different grounds that were recognized in one or more states.¹⁶⁴ It was in 1969 when Ronald Reagan, then governor of California, signed the first no-fault divorce law, which has since spread throughout the United States. With this change in the law, the divorce rate jumped dramatically.¹⁶⁵

The 1960s and 1970s in the United States is considered a time of radical change in divorce. Divorce became easier due to changes in state laws. As divorce became widespread in the United States, the laws and divorce rate also increased in other countries. The dismantling of state-constructed barriers to divorce began when the United

¹⁶⁴ Donald W. Shaner, *A Christian View of Divorce*, (Boston, MA: Brill, 1969), 8.

¹⁶⁵ Instone-Brewer, 264.

States, followed closely by Great Britain, adopted a “clean-beak” (one-time financial settlement) policy, which spread to Europe and the rest of the world.¹⁶⁶

Changes in laws regulating divorce closely align with concessions Moses made when he allowed divorce.

Denominational Differences

Because there are seemingly inconsistencies in the interpretation of scriptures concerning marriage, divorce and remarriage, there is significant disagreement among theologians, denominations, national and international religious leaders, pastors and laypersons over these topics. Quite a few Christian denominations recite traditional doctrine, but many ministers do not enforce it. Some ministers ignore it, sidestep it by not directly addressing it, evasively point people to the scriptures and instruct them to make up their own minds or interpret Jesus’ words as overstatements meant to counter the hypocritical teachings of the Pharisees.¹⁶⁷

Denominational differences spurn from theological positions on marriage as a covenant, not a sacrament; marriage under civil authority, not ecclesiastical; and marriage as breakable, not indissoluble.¹⁶⁸ The traditional doctrine seems misaligned with scripture or Jesus’ intent. There are some inherent problems with the interpretations that may stem from missing or gaps in Jewish historical documents. Jesus challenged the religious

¹⁶⁶ Cheris Kramarae and Dale Spender, eds., *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women's Issues and Knowledge*, vol. 2 (New York: Routledge, 2000), 659, <http://www.questia.com/read/109025325> (accessed April 10, 2013).

¹⁶⁷ Nobles, 24.

¹⁶⁸ Nobles, 95.

traditions of His day that did not fit the character, spirit, or law of God. Many regulations and constraints are human rules and not the commands of God.

Summary

Divorce is now widespread because it is easy, but this does not necessarily indicate a decline in moral standards. Imperfect and intolerable marriages have always been commonplace, as is evidenced by Church history and secular records.¹⁶⁹ Gentiles, the early church, rejected and renounced most of Christianity's Hebraic heritage. Denominational policies, doctrine and practices are formulated against the backdrop of this history. There is a need for corporate discourse and re-evaluation on behalf of denominational doctrine, policies and practices regarding divorce.¹⁷⁰

Confusion and complexity exists because these passages have been tragically misinterpreted for over eighteen hundred years, every since the Gentile, Greco-Roman church lost, ignored and/or rejected most of Christianity's Jewish heritage. In doing so, these scriptures were isolated from their Jewish context (historical, cultural and literary) and their original meaning was lost in an ocean of misinformation and false assumptions!¹⁷¹

The early Greek manuscripts record at least nineteen variations (i.e., omissions) of texts for these scriptures. Because of the variations, Nobles cautions against relying completely or heavily of these passages as a foundation for doctrine.¹⁷² We remain conduits of the "living word of Jesus" through which He is able to reveal His authoritative redemptive message in any situation.

¹⁶⁹ Instone-Brewer, 267.

¹⁷⁰ Nobles, 69.

¹⁷¹ Nobles, 114.

¹⁷² Nobles, 115.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this ministry project proposed that pastoral leadership, a well trained and prepared ministry team, and knowledge of scripture will promote spiritual and emotional healing to women experiencing hurt from divorce. This hypothesis is based on the awareness that the emotional trauma of divorce or separation may cause women within congregations to withdraw from active fellowship with the church due to feelings of shame, embarrassment and/or rejection from other members of the congregation. This awareness led to the belief that the church community can provide support and services in response to the challenges of divorced women.

The objectives of the study were to help church leadership and the ministry team minister to divorced women by: (1) provide a safe haven for divorced women to connect with other individuals experiencing similar life challenges; (2) present divorce related life stories that verbalized feelings experienced in divorce situations; (3) promote healing from hurt through knowledge and application of scriptures and prayer; and (4) encourage full integration into the life of the church.

The purpose of the project was to involve the church board and ministry team in a series of educational study sessions that focused on the concerns and challenges of divorced women, and women separated from their spouses. The training sessions would

provide the ministry team with some insight into the challenges of divorced women thereby, making the team more sensitive to the needs of divorced women. The primary goal of the divorce support sessions was to promote spiritual and emotional healing and a Christian environment for learning and growing in Christ.

Intervention

Initiating this ministry involved two phases. First, a ministry team had to be selected and trained. Then, the ministry team after planning and developing the program offered the support group ministry to divorced women in the congregation and community. The goals of the intervention were to help church leadership and the ministry team (1) develop a greater understanding of the challenges of divorced women; (2) pave the way for divorced women to recover and develop faith-based relationships with the congregation; and (3) encourage divorced women to integrate fully within the life of the church.

The ministry team was comprised of church members who were interested in the ministry. They were asked to volunteer to serve as facilitators and/or support personnel. All volunteers were required to complete the training program in preparation for ministry service. Volunteers for the training included three persons who had been divorced one or more times, one couple that had been married for thirty years, and two adult children of divorced parents.

The training module required the ministry team members to complete five three-hour training sessions over a period of one month. During these sessions, the volunteers watched and discussed divorce related videos on topics that included financial survival,

helping children through divorce, forgiveness, reconciliation, and developing a closer relationship with God. The sessions were intended to promote bonding between members of the ministry team and prepare the hearts and minds of the team members for the ministry. The ministry team worked with the material that would be used with the support group and shared personal divorce related experiences. Following the training sessions, volunteers were assigned for every position necessary. Two volunteers were selected to serve as alternate facilitators.

Six support group meetings, two hours per session, were conducted at the church facility over a period of two months. The researcher served as the facilitator for the six sessions. Participants in the first session included women who were divorced, pending divorce, and separated. Participants in the group were required to read and sign an agreement to comply with established research and ministry guidelines. Prior to the start of the series of sessions, a survey was administered to obtain information relative to the participants' beliefs, feelings, and attitudes about divorce. Each session started and ended with prayer for each individual in attendance. The participants would watch a video related to one of the topics for that session, then engage in reflective discussions on finances, children, forgiveness, sexuality, and biblical perspectives on divorce.

Research Design and Measurement

A qualitative survey design consisting of "yes" and "no" responses was used to determine change in beliefs and attitudes about divorce. The questions solicited personal feelings, opinions, and attitude changes. The researcher designed a survey of eighteen questions to be self-administered at the beginning and end of the six sessions. The

post-survey included questions soliciting the participants' evaluation of the divorce support ministry. The questions were added for the purpose of determining the effectiveness of the program, to evaluate any changes as a result of the sessions, and deciding whether to continue the program.

Treatment

Each session opened with prayer for each individual present followed by a thirty-minute video related to the topic. The remaining time was spent in reflective discussion, sharing, and testimonies. It was recommended that individuals journal, however, journaling was not a part of the assessment. Each session closed with a series of scriptures recommended for daily study, prayer requests and prayer for each individual present.

Weekly Meetings	Focus
Session 1	How will I meet my financial obligations? Managing income, credit, and debt; finding resources
Session 2	Single parenting and co-parenting. How do I help my children understand and handle what is happening?
Session 3	What about my sex life? How do I deal with my sexual urges?
Session 4	Why should I have to forgive when I didn't do anything wrong?
Session 5	Establishing a working relationship with ex-spouses.
Session 6	My life for His Glory.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Designing the Research Project

The hypothesis of this project proposed that an educational ministry program would promote spiritual change and healing in the lives of women who are experiencing challenges based on circumstances of divorce. The project was in collaboration with the ministry team and congregants of Scott's Revival Center, Franklin, Virginia.

The decision to pursue the project was based on several factors: the researcher is an ordained elder at Scott's Revival Center and works with the women's ministry, which oversees the divorce support program that seeks to bring healing to persons suffering from divorce; growing up in a Pentecostal church, the leaders taught that divorce was a sin; and, an awareness of the neglect of divorced women by the church.

Harold Ivan Smith, in the article "Ministry to the Divorced" states, "On any Sunday morning, there is overwhelming evidence of an epidemic of divorce-linked grief, some of which is long unresolved. For some, the desire to worship will be sabotaged by their numbness, anguish, and/or emotional pain."¹ The commentary expressed by Smith is consistent with the concerns of others including Olga Molina who, in a study of stressors that affect divorced women include the (1) lack of opportunities to learn job skills

¹ Harold Ivan Smith, "Ministry to the Divorced: Your Ebed-Melech Opportunity," *Enrichment Journal* (2013) http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200003/060_ministry_to_divorced.cfm (accessed March 21, 2013).

for promotions, (2) the inability to continue the desired level of education because of a need to earn money, and (3) having no partner with whom to share responsibilities.²

In response to the urgent need to address the sufferings, Kathleen E. Jenkins writes, “It has been documented that participation in faith communities can provide coping mechanisms and has the potential to promote health and well-being.”³ In an effort to achieve the desired healing, Jenkins “discusses the effectiveness of three aspects of divorce recovery: divorce-work, emotion-work and congregational experience.”⁴

The objective of this project was to establish a program that could serve as a conduit for healing and recovery for divorced women. The success of the program would require the participation and support of the leadership, ministry team, and congregants of Scott’s Revival Center. The educational resources would include: biblical and secular writings, focus groups, media presentations, facilitators and reflective question prompts. The objectives, through educational training, included providing the ministry team volunteers with the information and strategies to work effectively with the participants. To be effective, ministry team members needed an understanding of the challenges facing divorced women, and they needed to be sensitive in their approach to supporting this population.

The additional objectives of the project included the following:

1. Educating the ministry, staff and church relative to the many challenges of divorced women and how the church can respond to these issues in ways that will bring honor and glory to God.

² Olga Molina, “Stresses and Strengths of Working Women in Divorce Support Group.” *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 33, no. 3-4 (2000): 145-158. DOI: 10.1300/J087v33n03_09 (accessed April 7, 2013).

³ Kathleen E. Jenkins, “In Concert and Alone: Divorce and Congregational Experience,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49 no. 2 (June 2010): 278–292.

⁴ Ibid.

2. The development and implementation of a church ministry that will meet the needs of the women who are experiencing the challenges of divorce.
3. The development of faith-based relationships with the congregation whereby women facing these challenges can integrate or reintegrate fully into the life of the church.

The study would employ a qualitative design model. Michele Germain, in the book *The Jill Principle* states: “In the process of healing, it is important to address the mental, emotional, and physical challenges that arise upon the breakup of a relationship. Equally important is the necessity to connect with our spiritual self, the soul.”⁵ Qualitative research has special value for investigating complex and sensitive issues of healing, such as, connecting with self and expressing beliefs about God and other religious issues.

Molina Olga, in a qualitative study of divorced women, found that “cultural factors, such as a strong belief in God, close family relationships, strong work ethic and strong achievement orientation helped them adjust to divorce.”⁶ A qualitative survey design consisting of “yes” and “no” responses was used to determine change in beliefs and attitudes about divorce. The questions solicited personal feelings, opinions, and attitude changes.

Implementation

The project began with the training of perspective team members, including church leaders and other volunteers from the congregation. Two volunteers were identified during the training as possible facilitators, however, the researcher served as

⁵ Germain, 2.

⁶ Molina Olga, “African American Women's Unique Divorce Experiences.” *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 32, no. 3 (2005): 93-99. DOI: 10.1300/J087v32n03_05, 93-99 (accessed April 7, 2013).

facilitator for focus group meetings and discussions. The study, consisting of six sessions facilitated by the researcher, was conducted at Scott's Revival Center during a period of two months. All participants were African American women of the Christian faith from the church and community, who willingly participated in discussions.

The initial session began with a survey used to collect information from the participants. The intent of the questions was to collect data and information for the evaluation and measurement of the project. The discussions included topics relative to: 1) the Bible and theological issues, 2) prior beliefs, feelings and attitudes about divorce, 3) finance, forgiveness, and sexuality, 4) and, how children are affected by divorce. The study used survey research to assess healing, change in attitudes, feelings and change in beliefs after discussing six topics: (1) finances, (2) parenting and co-parenting, (3) sexuality, (4) forgiveness, (5) establishing working relationships, and (6) having a relationship with God. The researcher used a self-administered post-survey to evaluate any changes as a result of the sessions, to determine the effectiveness of the program, and for deciding whether to continue the program. The following charts provide summaries of the sessions.

Data Analysis – Divorce Support Seminar

Table 1. Responses to Question 1

In your view, is divorce/separation a sin in God's sight?

PARTICIPANT	PRE Yes	No	POST Yes	No
1		1		1
2		1		1
3	1	1	1	
4		1		1
5	1		1	
Count	2	4	2	3
% YES	20%		40%	
% YES & NO	20%			

Table 2. Responses to Question 2

Is there a correlation between divorce separation and church attendance?

PARTICIPANT	PRE Yes	No	POST Yes	No
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3		1	1	
4	1		1	
5		1		1
Count	3	2	4	1
% YES	60%		80%	

Table 3. Responses to Question 3

Does/did attending church regularly help you recover from divorce or separation?

PARTICIPANT	PRE Yes	No	POST Yes	No
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3		1	1	
4	1		1	
5	1			1
Count	4	1	4	1
% YES	80%		80%	

Table 4. Responses to Question 4

Could/can the pastor or church ministries do more to help your recovery from divorce or separation trauma?

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3	1		1	
4		1	1	
5	1		1	
Count	4	1	5	0
% YES	80%		100%	

Table 5. Responses to Question 15

Do you think your seeking forgiveness or making amends will affect your situation?

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	1		1	
2		1	1	
3		1	1	
4	1		1	
5	1		1	
Count	3	2	5	0
% YES	60%		100%	

Table 6. Responses to Question 5

Was/is it difficult to discuss your divorce/separation with others?

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1		1	1	
2		1	1	
3		1	1	
4	1		1	
5	1			1
Count	2	3	4	1
% YES	40%		80%	

Table 7. Responses to Question 7

Do/did your divorce/separation interfere with your daily functioning?

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3		1	1	
4	1		1	
5	1		1	
Count	4	1	5	0
% YES	80%		100%	

Table 8. Responses to Question 12

Do/did you experience anger after your divorce and/or separation?

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3		1	1	
4	1		1	
5	1		1	
Count	4	1	5	0
% YES	80%		100%	

Table 9. Responses to Question 13

Do/did you experience loneliness or loss of self-esteem after your divorce and/or separation?

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3	1		1	
4	1		1	
5	1		1	
Count	5	0	5	0
% YES	100%		100%	

Table 10. Responses to Question 14

Do/did you experience depression after your divorce and/or separation?

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3		1	1	
4	1		1	
5	1		1	
Count	4	1	5	0
% YES	80%		100%	

Table 11. Responses to Question 8

Do/did you blame your spouse/ex-spouse for the divorce and/or separation?

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3		1	1	
4	1		1	
5	1		1	
Count	4	1	5	0
% YES	80%		100%	

Table 12. Responses to Question 9

Do/did you blame yourself for the divorce and/or separation?

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1		1		1
2	1			1
3	1	1	1	
4		1	1	
5		1	1	
Count	2	4	3	2
% YES	40%		60%	

Table 13. Responses to Question 10
Do/did you think there is a possibility of reconciliation?

PARTICIPANT	PRE Yes	No	POST Yes	No
1	1	1		
2		1		1
3	1	1	1	
4	1			1
5	1		1	
Count	4	3	2	2
% YES	80%		40%	

Table 14. Responses to Question 11
Are/were friends and family helpful during your divorce and/or separation?

PARTICIPANT	PRE Yes	No	POST Yes	No
1	1			1
2	1		1	
3		1	1	
4		1	1	
5	1		1	
Count	3	2	4	1
% YES	60%		80%	

Table 15. Responses to Question 17
Do/did you think a new relationship helps recovery after divorce and/or separation?

PARTICIPANT	PRE Yes	No	POST Yes	No
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3	1		1	
4	1		1	
5		1		1
Count	4	1	4	1
% YES	80%		80%	

Table 16. Responses to Question 18

Do you think divorce support should be a church ministry?

PARTICIPANT	PRE Yes	No	POST Yes	No
1	1		1	1
2	1		1	
3	1		1	
4	1		1	
5	1		1	
Count	5			
% YES	100%		100%	

Table 17. Responses to Question 6.

Did you expect to recover within a year or sooner?

PARTICIPANT	PRE Yes	No	POST Yes	No
1		1		1
2		1		1
3	1			1
4	1		1	
5		1		1
Count	2	3	1	4
% YES	40%		20%	

Table 18. Responses to Question 16

Would/will you recommend the divorce support group to others?

PARTICIPANT	PRE Yes	No	POST Yes	No
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3	1		1	
4	1		1	
5	1		1	
Count	5	0	5	0
% YES	100%		100%	

Table 19. Responses to Question 19

Do you think this divorce support group should be a church ministry?

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3	1		1	
4	1		1	
5	1		1	
Count	5	0	5	0
% YES	100%		100%	

Data Analysis—Participants' Survey

The responses from the pre and post-survey were compared. Because of the small sample, the responses were counted and reported. Formal interviews were not conducted, however, participants spoke openly in church, to the pastor, and other members about the success of the program. The post survey added one additional question that required a worded response. The survey questions were designed to elicit feelings about the role of church in divorce recovery, friends, family and others, blame, and initial expectations of recovery. Participants were to respond 'yes' or 'no.'

Breakout of Survey Questions					
Church Role	Introspection	Blame	Relationship with Others	Recovery Expectation	Effectiveness of Group
(5)	(5)	(3)	(3)	(1)	(2)
1, 2, 3, 4, 15	5, 7, 12, 13, 14	8, 9, 10	11, 17, 18	6	16, 19

Five questions were designed to elicit the participants' expectations of the church. The majority of the participants were receptive to the church divorce support ministry. Two individuals felt that divorce was a sin; three did not. One respondent was undecided at the pre-survey, but responded a definite "No" on the post-survey. In the pretest, three

individuals felt that there was a correlation between divorce and church attendance. On the post-survey, four individuals felt that there was a correlation. Eighty percent of the respondents felt that regular church attendance helped them recover from the trauma of divorce or separation. For the pre-survey, 80% of the participants felt that the church ministries could do more to help. For the post-survey, 100% felt that the church ministry could do more to help. The 100% response for involvement indicated that the program was effective. One hundred percent of the respondents felt that seeking forgiveness or making amends improved their situation. Participants were very responsive during the session on forgiveness.

Five introspective questions were designed to probe deeper feelings. These questions were designed to sample hurtful emotions. Pre-survey responses indicated that 40% of the participants felt that it was difficult to discuss divorce/separation with others. On the post-survey, 80% indicated that it was difficult to discuss divorce/separation with others. On the post-survey, 100% of the participants indicated that the divorce/separation interfered with their daily functioning. On the pre-survey, 80% of the participants experienced anger after the divorce. On the post-survey, 100% indicated that they experienced anger. On the pre and post-survey, 100% of the participants experienced loneliness and/or loss of self-esteem. On the pre-survey, 80% of the participants experienced depression after the divorce. On the post-survey, 100% indicated that they experienced depression.

There was an interesting shift of blame on questions 8, 9, 10. On the pre-survey, 80% of the participants blamed their spouse/ex-spouse for the divorce. On the Post-survey, 100% blamed the spouse/ex-spouse. On the pre-survey, 40% of the

participants blamed themselves for the divorce/separation. On the post-survey, 60% indicated that they blamed themselves.

Following the sessions, some participants changed their position on reconciliation. On the pre-survey, 80% of the participants thought there was a possibility of reconciliation. On the post-survey, 40% thought there was a possibility of reconciliation. On the pre-survey, 60% of the participants indicated friends and family were helpful. On the post-survey, 80% indicated friends and family were helpful. Some felt that friends and family did not support them because the family did not agree with them. On the pre and post-survey, 80% of the participants felt that a new relationship was helpful. The sessions recommended waiting one year for every seven years of marriage before starting a new serious relationship.

On the pre and post-survey, 100% of the participants thought divorce support should be a church ministry. On the pre-survey, 40% of the participants expected to recover from divorce trauma within a year or sooner. The sessions emphasized that divorce is a loss, and it is normal for a grieving process to follow a loss. The grieving process takes time. On the pre and post-survey, 100% of the participants thought the divorce support group should become a church ministry. This supported the researcher hypothesis that churches can help divorced individuals.

The post-test added one worded response question: Which topic was most interesting to you? Four participants responded. Two individuals listed more than one topic. Every topic discussed was listed.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, REFLECTIONS

Summary

The purpose of the project was to involve the church leaders and ministry team in a series of educational study sessions that focused on the concerns and challenges of divorced and separated women. According to Rawlings and Carter, “three major problem areas precipitated by divorce are autonomy, financial challenges, and loneliness.”¹ Additionally, studies have identified substantial stress and relational changes that often follow divorce and the accompanying emotions such as anger, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and for some, emotional instability and mental illness.² An additional stressful problem facing about 80% of divorced women is that of being a single parent.³ Single female parents, whether divorced or never married, are often judged and criticized in a

¹ Edna I. Rawlings and Dianne K. Carter, *Psychotherapy for Women: Treatment Toward Equality* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1977), 434.

² Paul R. Amato, “The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62 no. 4 (2000): 1269–1287.

³ Elizabeth Howell and Marjorie Bayes, eds., “Divorced Women,” in *Women and Mental Health*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1981) 406 <http://www.questia.com/read/100287164>.) (accessed April 1, 2013)

social and political context in which they are systematically stereotyped, stigmatized, and even despised.⁴

The church is a venue where congregants assemble to support each other through crises, and is a vital support community for women who struggle with the many exigencies of divorce. Based on these realities, it was the belief that educational meetings would be an effective means of preparing the church and team to address these concerns with results to include a superb ministry team and congregants who respond effectively to the spiritual needs of divorced women. The desired result was forming a support group for divorced women experiencing similar challenges, establishing within the church community a safe haven for reflecting, and sharing thoughts. The aim was promoting healing from hurt through prayer, faith, and scriptural knowledge. The population of divorced women would be integrated more fully into the life of the church. The two hour sessions were conducted at the church facility over a period of two months and were open to the public.

Successful implementation of the support ministry required the selection and training of a ministry team. A helpful dynamic in selection of the ministry team was that every team member in some way had been affected by divorce; they shared similar divorce related experiences. They were able to understand and relate to participants who attended the program, which expedited communication and group bonding. Responsibilities of the ministry team members included facilitating sessions, managing the paperwork, providing security, refreshments, cleanup and lockup. Ministry team

⁴ Ruth Sidel, *Unsung Heroines: Single Mothers and the American Dream* (Berkeley, CA: Regents of the University of California Press, 2006), 21.

members also cared for the children when necessary. Even though two team members were approved as facilitators, the small group of participants only required one facilitator.

An initial self-administered survey requiring “yes” and “no” responses was used to gather information about the participant’s feelings and attitudes about divorce. A self-administered survey was used after the sessions to determine change in participants’ feelings, opinions, attitudes and beliefs. Journaling was encouraged, but not used to assess change in attitudes or beliefs. The researcher used a self-administered post-survey to evaluate any changes as a result of the sessions, to determine the effectiveness of the program, and for deciding whether to continue the program.

The researcher facilitated the series of six sessions. The group bonded and respected the guidelines of the program. Participants became comfortable and were able to reflect and share inner thoughts and feelings about divorce. Most of the meetings started promptly, opened with prayer for each individual present and was followed by a thirty-minute video related to the topic of discussion. The remaining time was spent in reflective discussion, sharing, and testimonies.

All participants in the group were African Americans of the Christian faith. They were all aware of the financial difficulties that can accompany divorce and were in different stages in the divorce process. Some had been divorced for years; some were separated; others were in the process of divorcing; some had remarried; some were struggling in new relationships; and some stated they wished they had attended the sessions earlier. Further, they were at varying stages of developing working relationships with ex-spouses; children were often factors in that process. Two had specific knowledge of living independently and paying child support. Single parenting and co-parenting was

a problem for some participants, and all participants experienced how children struggle to understand and handle divorce. They expressed varying opinions about sexuality and waiting before entering new relationships; and discussions were promoting awareness of feelings and ways to express these feelings. They stated the sessions provided an opportunity for the type of healing that could help prepare individuals for new relationships.

Discussions relative to theological views and the Bible, including what the Bible says about divorce and pre-marital sex, revealed that some participants felt that divorce was a sin, which added to their sense of failure as a Christian. Forgiveness and establishing viable relationships with former spouses presented challenges, which generated a lot of discussion. Participants were at varying stages of developing working relationships with ex-spouses. Relationships with ex-spouses were sometimes more complicated when the couple had children.

The theological foundation of this study discussed the womanist theology as a source of healing and this was evident. Without specific knowledge of womanist theology, the participants gave testimonies and displayed the rich traditions of faith discussed in womanist theology. The testimonies of faith were consistent with womanist theology. Specifically, the therapeutic effect of testimony—God makes a way when you do not see a way was prominent. And most felt that they were experiencing healing from hurt through prayer, faith, knowledge and application of biblical scriptures.

Results and Evaluation

Results from the survey indicated that the ministry was effective and well received by the participants. The four objectives for the project were met, as evidenced by the post- survey and participant responses. A safe haven community based divorce support ministry connected divorced individuals who could reflect, express, and share inner thoughts and feelings about divorce.

Most of the individuals indicated they had not verbalized and discussed their thoughts and feelings in a focused manner before. Several participants expressed relief from knowing that others understood their experiences. Some participants shared classic experiences of pastors, members of the congregation, friends and family who were insensitivity and/or rejected them. One participant's family rejected her because they did not agree with her decision to divorce, and they insisted on reminding her of that every times they saw her.

Spiritual healing was evidenced from the application of scripture, faith, and knowledge as reported by the participants. It was recommended that individuals journal, however, journaling was not included for assessment.

Reflections

The researcher began the project trying to reconcile what she had heard about divorce in church as a child and the reality of divorce today. The study raised more questions than answers. The enormity of the situations, the number of people affected, repercussions of decisions, and the many unanswered questions necessitate more study and work.

Participants' feelings were closely associated with their belief whether divorce "is" or "is not" a sin. The fact that participants were unanimous in their support for the divorce support project was instrumental in deciding to continue the support group. Respondents articulated signs and symptoms of the emotional distress and financial difficulties discussed in the study. None of the participants had received professional counseling prior to attending the group. They welcomed the support group and acknowledged that this was the first time that they were dealing with the difficulty of resolving the hurt in a focused way, and that it had always been uncomfortable for them to discuss divorce.

An interesting aspect was the involvement of teen and adult children of divorced or separated parents. This population had not been considered during the initial planning; however, the children provided significant perspectives on the topics. There were adult children who still felt the pain and hurt of seeing their parents (some seniors) divorced. Adult children are seeing their parents who were married for over twenty years divorced. The parents felt that the children are grown and should mind their own business. This is a new area of consideration for the researcher.

Even though the facilitator had a format in mind, it was difficult to keep the discussions self-reflective. There was an inclination to focus on the ex-spouse. Individuals who were quiet during the group time would usually discuss things one-on-one after group or call later. The sessions were not intended to provide specific individual answers for participants; rather, individuals were encouraged to reflect on the information, read the scriptures suggested, and decide what touches them. Participants

were encouraged to share scriptures they relied on for spiritual help. Participants who called or talked after the meetings always indicated that the sessions were helpful.

Divorced women who did not attend the support group often said they were “over it.” The researcher was not sure what that statement meant. More insight is necessary to understand the implications of that statement. The researcher was hopeful that individuals who had successfully dealt with the changed relationship of divorce would be good volunteers for the ministry team. One goal of the program was to have participants who benefited from the program become members of the leadership team. However, volunteers who work on the ministry team should have a sense of calling to the divorce support ministry.

Undergirding this study was the researcher’s belief that faith in God and spirituality were avenues to healing, as taught to the researcher as a child growing up in a family of the Pentecostal faith. The researcher believes in the importance of narrative and testimony as recognized paths to emotional and spiritual healing. Demonstrative expression of the power of God is often not accepted and even stigmatized; however, the researcher was able to relate to the women who gave powerful testimonies of healing because of personal experience. Some of the participants reported emotional and spiritual healing based on their individual belief in God. These beliefs and feelings are augmented as members of an Interdenominational congregation with a Pentecostal history.

The participants’ beliefs about God are influenced by their past spiritual life. Womanist theology references the complex realities of black women’s lives and the role of spirituality in the healing process. Healing incorporates spirituality. The women frequently made statements such as “God worked it out” or God is able to work it out.”

Most of their testimonies attributed survival and positive outcomes to faith in God. The researcher believes that divorce individuals are worthy of a support ministry. Often, divorced people are the prime group ready to receive and respond to God's word.

Conclusion

Although women were the focus of this study, the program was available to men. While conducting research for this project, the researcher noted evidence of a ministry to meet this need. This avails the need to have more males trained to serve on the leadership team. Even though participants signed a confidentiality agreement, other divorced members in the church expressed concerns that there would be leaks and gossip. Chapter Two of this study links fear of gossip with shame. So far there have been no problems with violations of confidentiality; however, the researcher recognizes that the personal and private nature of divorce could make some potential participants uncomfortable. The researcher can only trust that the other team members and participants honor that agreement.

It was the consensus of the participants, pastor and congregation, that the divorce support ministry was a success. The researcher would like to expand the program to include more volunteers and participants. In anticipation of future growth, the researcher knows there is a need to become knowledgeable about other referral resources and services that future participants may need, especially health, mental health, and financial. The ministry team approach cannot be emphasized enough. It is imperative that a Godly team is selected, and that training is state of the art.

In conclusion, the researcher attributes the success of the project to the participants, for their spiritual transformation brought about through the prayer and scriptures. Transformation for the participants was evident in their conversation and remarks. Most of the individuals indicated that they had not verbalized and discussed the deep thoughts and feelings in a focused manner before. Several participants expressed relief from knowing that others understood their experiences.

APPENDIX A

PASTORS' GUIDE FOR A DIVORCE SUPPORT MINISTRY

Pastor's Guide for a Divorce Support Ministry

Many churches have sat idly by and ignored the issue of divorce, failed to see the problem or purposely avoided it for fear of alienating their congregations.

Mission Statement

The mission of the church is to honor God by reaching out to those in need of spiritual healing. This ministry exists to extend His love in all situations, and ultimately, we pray, to bring Him glory. The ministry mission is to serve, support and minister to individuals affected by divorce and educate the church in ways to support and minister to them.

Standards and Guidelines

As with every church ministry, God should be the head. Serving and witnessing is the ultimate purpose of the ministry. The Divorce Support Ministry is considered an in reach and outreach ministry of the church. The divorce support ministry functions under the oversight of the pastor who will clarify the church's position on divorce, select the curriculum, oversee the content, procedures, and methods used to effect spiritual healing.

Understanding Divorce

Divorce is the end of a relationship much like death, but a walking death. Unlike death, closure does not occur like the permanency of death. Like death, there is a grieving process that takes time for recovery and healing. Divorce most closely approximates surviving a catastrophe. Divorce brings with it emotional trauma characterized by upsetting emotions, frightening memories, distrust of people, loneliness and disconnectedness. The rippling effect of divorce means that the ministry extends far beyond the individuals who show up at the sessions. The spiritual message from the church ministry is that you can heal, recover and move on.

Ministry Objectives

The ministry is to be purposeful and intentional in providing an emotionally safe place for individuals to deal with and discuss emotional issues and problems. During group time with and after support sessions, we will be focused on:

1. Helping individuals recognize and acknowledge the feelings they have from the divorce experience.
2. Providing analogies and language to help the individuals articulate these feelings.
3. Helping individuals formulate a plan for dealing with these feelings.
4. Providing friendship and emotional support for individuals during this time.
5. Providing biblical scriptures that offer support for lifelong recovery.

Divorce Support Schematic

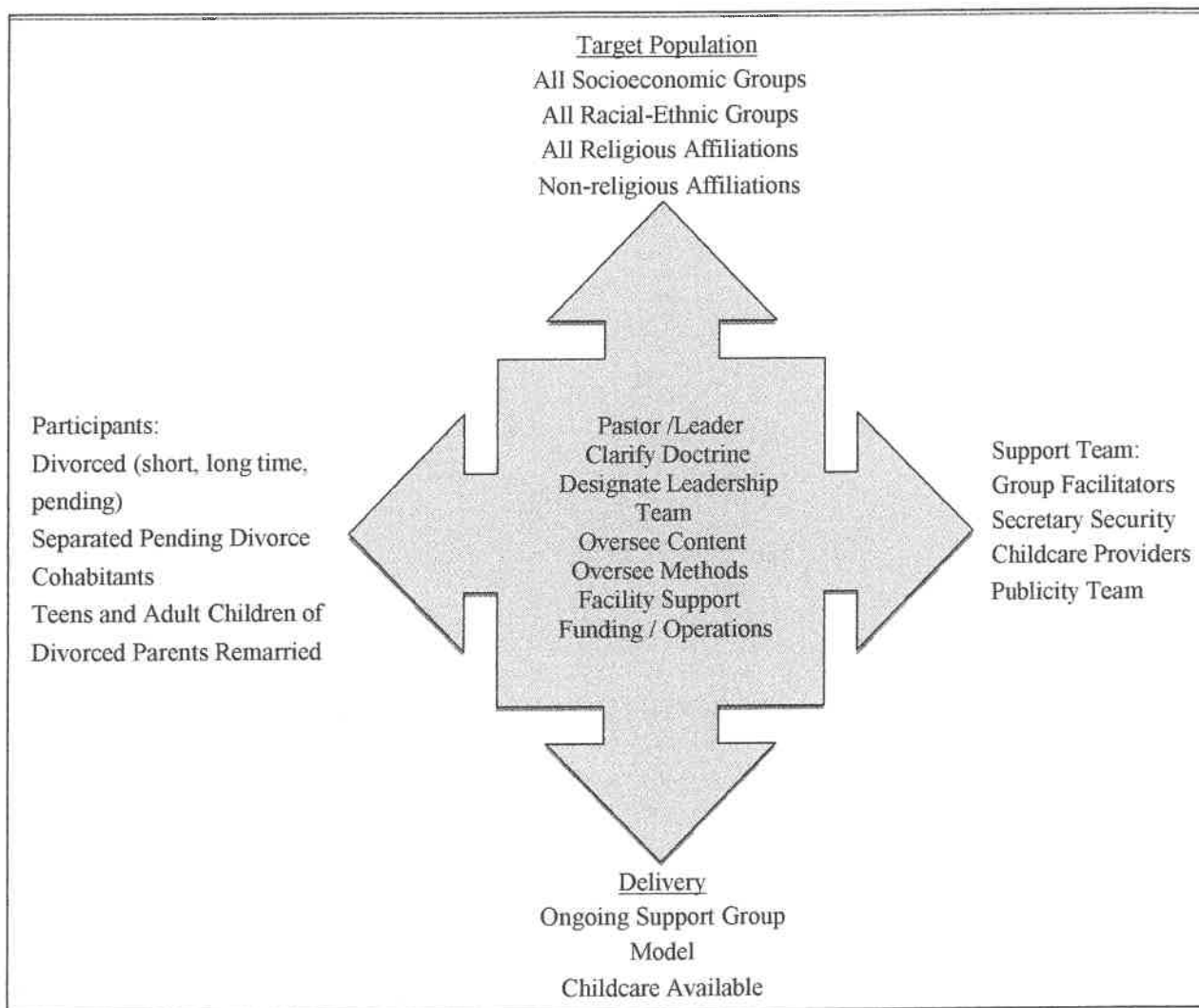


Figure 1 A Comprehensive Framework for a Divorce Support Ministry

The ministry is an outreach ministry to individuals of all socioeconomic, racial, religious and non-religious groups. It is open to divorced individuals (short time, long time, pending), individuals terminating life partnership relationships, remarried individuals, teen and adult children of divorced individuals.

Organizing the Team

The pastor, as head of the church, operating with a clear vision of the mission, is leader and overseer of the ministry. It is a servant ministry. The pastor has the responsibility of insuring that the ministry lines up with the church mission. The pastor has the additional responsibility of selecting an appropriate curriculum, designating the ministry team and insuring that the ministry team members are well trained.

Selecting the right team is key to the success of the program. Team members should be focused, willing leaders, purveyors of hope, and have a positive influence on others. In selecting team members, you will find that most team members will have a connection to some divorce related issues. Sharing this information helps in bonding this team. It is important that training the team includes team members exploring and understanding their connection to divorce. It is important to have team members who have recovered and healed from their divorce related issues.

Members of the ministry team should: (1) be in good standing with the church; (2) understand the church doctrine as it relates to divorcees; (3) have a background check; (4) be developed, empowered in meaningful ministry.

Team members should:

- (1) Exhibit a Godly character and lifestyle.
- (2) Have a deep passion for Jesus.
- (3) Exhibit personal humility.
- (4) Have genuine concern and love for people.
- (5) Be team focused
- (6) Be willing and able to participate

APPENDIX B
PRE AND POST-SURVEY QUESTIONS

Entrance Survey

1. In your view is divorce/separation a sin in God's sight?
Y ____ N ____
2. Is there a correlation between divorce/separation and church attendance?
Y ____ N ____
3. Does/did attending church regularly help you recover from a divorce/separation?
Y ____ N ____
4. Could/can the pastor or church ministries do more to help your recovery from divorce/separation? Y ____ N ____
5. Was/is it difficult to discuss your divorce/separation with others?
Y ____ N ____
6. Do/did you expect to recover from divorce within a year or sooner?
Y ____ N ____
7. Do/did your divorce/separation interfere with your daily functioning?
Y ____ N ____
8. Do/did you blame your spouse/ex-spouse for the divorce/separation?
Y ____ N ____
9. Do/did you blame yourself for the divorce/separation?
Y ____ N ____
10. Do/did you think there is a possibility of reconciliation?
Y ____ N ____
11. Are/were friends and family helpful during your divorce/separation?
Y ____ N ____
12. Do/did you experience anger after your divorce/separation?
Y ____ N ____
13. Do/did you experience loneliness or loss of self-esteem after your divorce/separation? Y ____ N ____
14. Do/did you experience depression after your divorce/separation?
Y ____ N ____
15. Do you think you seeking forgiveness or making amends will affect your situation? Y ____ N ____

16. Would/will you recommend the divorce support ministry to others?
Y ____ N ____
17. Do/did you think same-sex friendships would help during your separation/divorce? Y ____ N ____
18. Do/did you think a new relationship helps recovery after divorce/separation?
Y ____ N ____

Post-Survey

19. In your view is divorce/separation a sin in God's sight?
Y ____ N ____
20. Is there a correlation between divorce/separation and church attendance?
Y ____ N ____
21. Does/did attending church regularly help you recover from a divorce/separation?
Y ____ N ____
22. Could/can the pastor or church ministries do more to help your recovery from divorce/separation? Y ____ N ____
23. Was/is it difficult to discuss you divorce/separation with others?
Y ____ N ____
24. Do/did you expect to recover from divorce within a year or sooner?
Y ____ N ____
25. Do/did your divorce/separation interfere with your daily functioning?
Y ____ N ____
26. Do/did you blame your spouse/ex-spouse for the divorce/separation?
Y ____ N ____
27. Do/did you blame yourself for the divorce/separation?
Y ____ N ____
28. Do/did you think there is a possibility of reconciliation?
Y ____ N ____
29. Are/were friends and family helpful during your divorce/separation?
Y ____ N ____
30. Do/did you experience anger after your divorce/separation?
Y ____ N ____

31. Do/did you experience loneliness or loss of self-esteem after your divorce/separation? Y ____ N ____
32. Do/did you experience depression after your divorce/separation? Y ____ N ____
33. Do you think you seeking forgiveness or making amends will affect your situation? Y ____ N ____
34. Would/will you recommend the divorce support ministry to others? Y ____ N ____
35. Do/did you think same-sex friendships would help during your separation/divorce? Y ____ N ____
36. Do/did you think a new relationship helps recovery after divorce/separation? Y ____ N ____
37. Do you think divorce support should be a church ministry? Y ____ N ____

Which divorce topic was most interesting to you?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Jay E. *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986.
- Allison, Susan. *Conscious Divorce: Ending A Marriage with Integrity*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2001.
- Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1981.
- Amato, Paul R. "The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62, no. 4 (2000), 1269–87.
- Amato, Paul R., Alan Booth, David R. Johnson, and Stacy J. Rogers. *Alone Together: How Marriage in America Is Changing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Ammerman, Nancy T. *Congregations and Community*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997.
- Andersen, Francis I. and David Noel Freedman. *The Anchor Bible, Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1980.
- Anzaldúa, G. E., and A. Keating, eds., *This Bridge we Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*. New York, NY: Routledge Publishing, 2005.
- Archer, K. J. "A Pentecostal Way of Doing Theology: Method and Manner." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 3 (2007), 301–314.
- Baar, Karen. *Women Scripting Life After Fifty*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale Inc., 2004.
- Bach, Alice ed. *Women in the Hebrew Bible*. New York, NY: Routledge Publisher, 1999.
- Bair, Deirdre. *Calling it Quits: Late-Life Divorce and Starting Over*. New York, NY: Random House Publisher, 2007.

- Baker, Jennifer. "Uncontested Divorce Information," *Forest Institute of Professional Psychology* (February 12, 2008).
<http://www.articlesfactory.com/articles/law/uncontested-divorce-information.html>
 (accessed March 27, 2013).
- Barna Group
<http://www.barna.org/family-kids-aricles/42-new-marriage-and-divorce-statistics-released?q=divorce+statistics> (accessed April 3, 2013).
- Barth, Karl. *God Here and Now*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2003.
<http://www.questia.com/read/104246970> (accessed January 14, 2013).
- Bates, Gerri. *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005.
- Battle, Michael. *The Black Church in America: African American Christian Spirituality*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Beedy, H.D. *Grace Abounding: A Commentary on the Book of Hosea*. Edited by Fredrick Carlson Holmgren and George A.F. Knight. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989.
- Bellah, Robert N. et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985.
- Bender, David. *Marriage and Divorce*. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, 1997.
- Bird, Phyllis A. *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1997.
<http://www.questia.com/read/119193356> (accessed March 6, 2013).
- Bolton, Sharon. *Emotion Management in the Workplace*. New York, NY: Palgrave, 2005.
- Borchert Gerald L., "John 1–11," *The New American Commentary*, vol. 25A. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, (1996), 205–206.
- Bowker, John. *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- Brady, Henry E., and David Collier. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010.
- Bridges, Linda McKinnish. "Between Text and Sermon: John 4:5-42," *Interpretation* 48, no. 2 (1994), 173. <http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-2805424> (accessed March 26, 2013).

- Bright, John. *A History of Israel*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Hope Within History*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1987.
- _____. *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1994.
- _____. *Tradition for Crisis: A Study in Hosea*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1968.
- Bulman, Raymond F. *A Blueprint for Humanity: Paul Tillich's Theology of Culture*. East Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Press, Inc., 1981.
- Caird, G. B. *New Testament Theology*. L. D. Hurst, ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. <http://www.questia.com/read/60256258> (accessed January 14, 2013).
- Calvin, John. *Back to the Well: Women's Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels*. Frances Taylor Gench ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.
- Carey, Patrick W., and Joseph T. Lienhard. *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000. <http://www.questia.com/read/14307720> (accessed January 10, 2013).
- Carnes, Andrew. *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993.
- Carr, Amy. "Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining – By Shelly Rambo." *Conversations in Religion and Theology* 9, no. 2 (2011), 141–153.
- Celello, Kristin. *Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth-Century United States*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Chaves, Mark. *Congregations in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Cherlin, Andrew J. *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today*. New York, NY: Knopf, 2009.
- Chiswick, Carmel, and Evelyn Lehrer. "Religious Intermarriage: An Economic Perspective." *Contemporary Jewry* 12, no.1 (1991), 21–34.
- Cohen, Edmund D. *The Mind of the Bible-Believer*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988. <http://www.questia.com/read/91786801> (accessed January 10, 2013).
- Comas-Diaz, Lillian. "Spirits: Reclaiming Womanist Sacredness Into Feminism," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 32 (2007): 13–21.

- Cone, James, *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010.
- Coontz, Stephanie. *Marriage, A History: From Obedience to Intimacy or how Love Conquered Marriage*. New York, NY: Viking Press, 2004.
- Corcoran, Kathleen O'Connell. "Psychological and Emotional Aspects of Divorce," *Mediators and Everything Mediation*, (June 1997).
<http://www.mediate.com/articles/psych.cfm#stats> (accessed April 2, 2013).
- Covy, Karen A. *When Happily Ever After Ends: How to Survive your Divorce – Emotionally, Financially and Legally*. Naperville, IL: Sphinx Publisher, 2006.
- Craddock, Fred B. "Living by the Word: The Witness at the Well," March 7, 1990.
<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=7&sid=59c22556-8775-4149-a098-b3ae4eda68d6%40sessionmgr14&hid=23> (accessed April 5, 2013).
- Davidman, Lynn. *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn To Orthodox Judaism*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991.
- Deffinbaugh, Bob. "The Manifestation of Messiah to the Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42)." From the Series: *Highlights in the Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ*. <http://bible.org/seriespage/manifestation-messiah-samaritan-woman-john-41-42> (accessed April 14, 2013).
- DeNora, Tia. *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- "Divorce Rate." Divorce Rates. <http://www.divorcereform.org/rates.html> (accessed March 16, 2013).
- Dunbar Agnes B. C. "A Dictionary of Sainly Women." In *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*. David Lyle Jeffrey, ed. London: George Bell and Sons, 1905.
- Ellison, Christopher G. "Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?" *Journal of Family Issues* 20, no. 1 (1999), 87–113.
- _____. "Size, Conflict, and Opportunities for Interaction: Congregational Effects on Members' Anticipated Support and Negative Interaction." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48, no.1 (2009), 1–15.
- Elwell, Walter A. ed. "Redeem, Redemption." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996.
<http://m.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/redeem-redemption.html> (accessed November 16, 2012).

- Eslinger, Lyle. "The Wooing of the Woman at the Well: Jesus, the Reader and Reader-Response Criticism," *Journal of Literature and Theology* I, (1987), 167-193.
- Fabricius, Kim. Comment on "Ten propositions of Karl Barth: Theologian." *Faith and Theology*, November 10, 2006. <http://www.faith-theology.com/2006/11/ten-propositions-on-karl-barth.html> (accessed November, 2012).
- Farthing, John L. "Holy Harlotry: Jerome Zanchi and the Exegetical History of Gomer Hosea 1-3," *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, eds. Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.
- Ferber, Donna F. *From Ex Wife to Exceptional Life a Woman's Journey Through Divorce*. Farmington, CT: Purple Lotus Press, 2006.
- Felder, Cain Hope, ed. *Stony the Road we Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991.
- Fields, Karen E. "Religious Involvement and Subjective Well-being." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 32, no.1 (1991), 80-99.
- Finnamore, Suzanne. *Split: A Memoir of Divorce*. New York, NY: Dutton Publishing, 2008.
- Fisher, Bruce and Robert Alberti. *Rebuilding: When Your Relationship Ends*. Atascadero, CA: Impact Publishers, 2000.
- Freedman, David N., Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, ed. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000.
<http://www.questia.com/read/118845400> (accessed January 14, 2013).
- Freedman, David N., Gary A. Herion, David F. Graf, and John David Pleins. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992.
- Fulkerson, Mary M. *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Furedi, Frank. *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability In An Uncertain Age*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Gaither, Mark W. *Redemptive Divorce: A Biblical Process that Offers Guidance for the Suffering, Healing for the Offending Spouse, and the Best Catalyst for Restoration*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2008.
- Garrett, Sheryl. *Surviving Divorce*. Chicago, IL: Dearborn Trade Publisher, 2006.

- Gench, Frances Taylor. *Back to the Well: Women's Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.
- Germain, Michele. *The Jill Principle: A Woman's Guide to Healing your Spirit after Divorce or Breakup*. Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publishing, 2006.
- Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991.
- Glaser, Barney G., and Anselm Strauss. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies For Qualitative Research*. New York, NY: Aldine De Gruyter, 1967.
- Gottwald, Norman K., and Richard A. Horsley, ed. *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.
- Granfield, Patrick. *Theologians at Work*. New York, NY: Macmillan, 2013.
- Grimes, R. L. *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982.
- Grissom, Steve, and Kathy Leonard. *Divorce Care, Hope, Help and Healing during and after your Divorce*. Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2005.
- Grof, Stanislav. "Brief History of Transpersonal Psychology," *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 27, (2008), 46–54.
- Hackstaff, Karla B. *Marriage in a Culture of Divorce*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999.
- Hagner, Donald A. ed. *A Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing, 1993.
- Ham, Barry D. *God Understands Divorce*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publisher, 2012.
- Hamerton-Kelly, Robert. *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979.
<http://www.questia.com/read/82404216> (accessed February 1, 2013).
- Hawkins, Alan J., Jason S. Carroll, William J. Doherty, and Brian Willoughby. "A Comprehensive Framework for Marriage Education." *Family Relations* 53, no. 5 (2004), 547–558.
- Heaton, E. W. *Everyday Life in Old Testament Times*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956. <http://www.questia.com/read/6366872> (accessed March 6, 2013).

- Heaton, Tim B. "Factors Contributing to Increasing Marital Stability in the United States." *Journal of Family Issues* 23, no. 3 (2002): 392–409.
- Hetherington, Mavis E., and John Kelly. *For Better or for Worse: Divorce Reconsidered*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002.
- Hinson, Glenn. *Fire in my Bones: Transcendence and the Holy Spirit in African American Gospel*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 2000.
- Hochschild, Arlie. "Emotion-Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure." *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 3 (1979): 551–75.
- Hoffman, C. D., and D.K. Ledford, "Adult Children of Divorce: Relationships with their Mothers and Fathers Prior to, Following Parental Separation, and Currently." *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 24, no. 3-4 (1995): 41-58.
- Holiday, Juko Martina. "The Word the Body and the Kinfolk: The Intersection of Transpersonal Thought with Womanist Approaches to Psychology," *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 29, no. 2 (2010): 103–120.
- Hooks, Bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000.
- _____. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1988.
- Hopper, Joseph. "The Symbolic Origins of Conflict in Divorce." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63, no. 2 (2001), 430–445.
- Hornsby, Teresa J. "Israel has become a Worthless Thing: Re-reading Gomer in Hosea 1–3." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 82, (1999): 124–125.
- Howe, Michele and Christopher A. Foetisch. *Burdens Do a Body Good: Meeting Life's Challenges with Strength (and Soul)*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publisher, 2010.
- Howell, Robert T. "Qualitative Research Methodologies." *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education Virginia Tech* 34, no. 2 (1997).
<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JITE/v34n2/editor.html> (accessed February 12, 2013).
- Howell, Elizabeth and Marjorie Bayes, eds. "Divorced Women," in *Women and Mental Health*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1981).
<http://www.questia.com/read/100287164> (accessed April 1, 2013).

- Hughes, Robert. "How Religion Shapes Our Attitude Toward Divorce." The Huff Post Blog, comment posted March 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/Robert-hughes/does-religion-shape-our-a_b_782885.html?view=print&comm_ref=false (accessed January 17, 2013).
- Hunsinger, George. *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000. <http://www.questia.com/read/119931606> (accessed January 10, 2013).
- Hunter, Millicent. *How To Survive A Hurt Attack*. Philadelphia, PA: Hunter House Publishers, 2012.
- Hurst, L. D. ed. *New Testament Theology*. Oxford, CT: Clarendon Press, 1995. <http://www.questia.com/read/60256393> (accessed February 1, 2013).
- Huston, Ted, and Heidi Melz. "The Case for Marriage: The Devil is in the Details." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66, no. 4 (2004), 943–958.
- Instone-Brewer, David. *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002.
- Irvine, Leslie. *Codependent Forevermore: The Invention of Self in a Twelve Step Group*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Irwin, Alexander C. *EROS Toward The World: Paul Tillich and the Theology of the Erotic*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1991.
- James, Sharon. "An Overview on Feminist Theology," *Theology Network Blog*, overview posted 2013. <http://www.theologynetwork.org/theology-of-every/an-overview-of-feminist-theology.htm> (accessed on January 25, 2013).
- James, W. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. New York, NY: Collier Macmillan, 1961.
- Jehle, Frank, and Karl Barth quoted in *Ever Against the Stream*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.
- Jenkins, Kathleen E. "In Concert and Alone: Divorce and Congregational Experience." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 2 (June 2010), 278–292.
- Kaminer, Wendy. *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional: The Recovery Movement and Other Self-Help Fashions*. New York, NY: Addison-Wesley, 1993.
- Kefalas, Maria. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007.

- Kirk-Duggan, Cheryl A., ed. *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible*. Boston, MA: Brill, 2004. <http://www.questia.com/read/118799099> (accessed January 18, 2013).
- Koenig, Harold G., Michael E. McCullough, and David B. Larson. *Handbook of Religion and Health*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Koester, Craig. *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, Fortress, 2003.
- Kramarae, Cheris and Dale Spender, eds. *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women's Issues and Knowledge*, vol. 2. New York, NY: Routledge, 2000. <http://www.questia.com/read/109025325> (accessed April 10, 2013).
- Kreitzer, Larry J. and Deborah W. Rooke, eds. *On the Trail of a Good Story: Ciphers in the Sand: Interpretations of the Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11)*. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press.
- _____. *Wayward Women and Broken Promises: Ciphers in the Sand: Interpretations of the Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11)*. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.
- Krumrei, E. J., A. Mahoney, and K. I. Pargament. "Divorce and the Divine: The Role of Spirituality in Adjustment to Divorce." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71, (2009), 373–383.
- Kwilecki, Susan. *Becoming Religious: Understanding Devotion to the Unseen*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1999.
- Kwilecki, Susan. "Religion and Coping: A Contribution From Religious Studies." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 4 (2004), 477–89.
- Lee, Witness. *Life-Study of the Minor Prophets*. Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry Publisher, 1997.
- Lilliston, L., P. M. Brown, and H. P. Schliebe. "Perceptions of Religious Solutions to Personal Problems of Women." *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 38, no. 9 (1982), 546–549.
- Lincoln, Eric C., and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990.
- Lockyer, Herbert. *All the Women of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967.

Luther, Martin. "Martin Luther: Freedom and Faith." *Theologians and Theology* (2012). <http://www.theologian-theology.com/theologians/martin-luther-freedom-faith/> (accessed February 9, 2013).

Malinowski, B. *The Foundations of Faith and Morals*. London: Oxford University Press, 1936.

Marti, Gerardo. *Hollywood Faith: Holiness, Prosperity, and Ambition in a Los Angeles Church*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008.

_____. "When Does Religious Racial Integration Count: A Caution About Seeking Ideal Ethnographic Cases." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 2 (2010), 224–30.

Matthews, D. A., and C. Clark. *The Faith Factor: Proof of the Healing Power of Prayer*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1998.

Mays, James Luther. *Hosea: A Commentary*. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1969.

McGreal, Ian P., ed. *Great Thinkers Of The Western World*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1992.

McGuire, Meredith B. *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008.

McMahon, C. "Theology and the Redemptive Mission of the Church: A Catholic Response to Milbanks's Challenge." *The Heythrop Journal* 51, (2010), 781–794.

McNiff, Jean, Pamela Lomax, and Jack Whitehead. *You and Your Action Research Project*. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003.

Miller, J. B. *Toward a New Psychology of Women*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976.

Mitchem, Stephanie Y. *Introducing Womanist Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002.

Molina, Olga. "African American Women's Unique Divorce Experiences." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 32, no. 3 (2005), 93–99. DOI: 10.1300/J087v32n03_05, 93–99.

_____. "Stresses and Strengths of Working Women in Divorce Support Group." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 33, no. 3–4 (2000), 145–158. DOI: 10.1300/J087v33n03_09 (accessed April 7, 2013).

Moloney, Francis J., and Daniel J. Harrington, ed. *The Gospel of John*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998.

- Morris, Robert Corin. *Suffering and the Courage of God: Exploring how Grace & Suffering Meet*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2005.
- Morrison, Stacy. *Falling Apart in one Piece*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2010.
- Muhlhan, Brett. *Determined and Subjective Love: Agreeing with Luther's Evangelical Reading of Hosea 2*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012.
- Muller, Richard A. and John L. Thompson, ed. *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*. Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996.
- Mullins, Larry C., Kimberly P. Brackett, Donald W. Bogie, and Daniel Pruett. "The Impact of Religious Homogeneity on the Rate of Divorce in the United States." *Sociological Inquiry* 74, no.3 (2004), 338–54.
- Munroe, Myles. *Single, Married, Separated, and Life after Divorce*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publisher, 2003.
- Murray, Stephen Butler. "Socially Relevant Theology and the Courage to Be: The Influence of Paul Tillich on the Womanist Theology of Delores S. Williams," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 58, no. 3-4 (2004), 95 –111.
- Myers, Allen C. *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987, 283.
- Nauraine, Johanna. "Women and Divorce," 2010.
<http://www.therapistinchicago.com/women-and-divorce.html> (accessed March 26, 2013).
- Nelson, Geoffrey, and Isaac Prilleltensky, *Community Psychology: In Pursuit of Liberation and Well-being*. Basingstoke Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Nobles Sherman, *God is a Divorcee Too!* Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing, LLC, 2004.
- Nolan, James L. *The Therapeutic State: Justifying Government at Century's End*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 1988.
- Nolland, John. "The Gospel Prohibition of Divorce: Tradition History and Meaning," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 58, (1995), 19-35.
- O'Brien, Julia M. *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor: Theology and Ideology in the Prophets*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.
- O'Day, Gail. "John" *The Women's Bible Commentary*. Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe, eds. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992.

- Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry Into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*. Trans. by John W. Harvey. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1950.
- Pargament, Kenneth. *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice*. New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1997.
- Parkes, C. M. *Bereavement*. New York, NY: International Universities Press, 1972.
- Patterson, Sheron C. *New Faith a Black Christian Woman's Guide to Reformation, Re-creation, Rediscovery, Renaissance, Resurrection and Revival*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000.
- Peppier, Alice Stolper. *Divorced and Christian*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1974.
- Pleins, J. David. "The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible." *The Bible and Interpretation* 2012. <http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/hebrewbible.shtml> (accessed March 6, 2013).
- Rambo, Shelly. *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2010.
- Rawlings, Edna I. and Dianne K. Carter, "Divorced Women," in *Women and Mental Health*, Elizabeth Howell and Marjorie Bayes eds. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1981). <http://www.questia.com/read/100287164> (accessed April 1, 2013).
- _____. *Psychotherapy for Women: Treatment Toward Equality*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1977.
- Reid, S. B. ed. *Prophets and Paradigms: Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker*. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996.
- Reissman, Catherine K. *Divorce Talk: Woman and Men Make Sense of Personal Relationships*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990.
- Richards, Sue and Angie Peters. *Women of the Bible: The Life and Times of Every Woman in the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 2003.
- Rieff, Philip. *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1966.
- Robbins, Joan Hamerman. *Knowing Herself: Women Tell Their Stories in Psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Plenum Press, 1990. <http://www.questia.com> (accessed March 27, 2013).
- Robinson, Wheeler H., and Ernest A. Payne, ed. *The Cross of Hosea*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1949.

- Rogerson, J. W. *According to the Scriptures: The Challenge of Using the Bible in Social, Oral and Political Questions*. Oakville, CT: David Brown Book Co., 2007.
- Rollin, Betty. *Here's the Bright Side*. New York, NY: Random House, 2007.
- Roof, Wade C. *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Ross, Rosetta E. *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003.
- Rowe, Theresa L. *10 Secrets to Strengthening Your Body and Soul*. New York, NY: Guideposts Publisher, 2008.
- Ruether, Rosemary R. *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998. <http://www.questia.com/read/119878181> (accessed February 5, 2013).
- Sailhamer, John H. *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach*. Grand Rapid, MI: Zondervan Publisher House, 1995.
- Sales, Amy L., and Gary A. Tobin, ed. *Church and Synagogue Affiliation: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995. www.questia.com (accessed January 23, 2013).
- Scheff, Thomas J. "Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory." *Social Theory* 18, no.1 (2000), 84–99.
- Schneiders, Sandra M. *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*. San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1991.
- Schottroff, Luise. "Women as Followers of Jesus in New Testament Times: An Exercise in Sociohistorical Exegesis of the Bible," in *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*. Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley eds. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.
- Schreurs, Agneta. *Psychotherapy and Spirituality: Integrating the Spiritual Dimension into Therapeutic Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2002. <http://www.questia.com/read/119659870> (accessed November 4, 2012).
- Setel, T.D., and Letty M. Russell ed. *Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985.
- Shaner, Donald W. *A Christian View of Divorce*. Boston, MA: Brill, 1969.

- Shelly, Rubel. *Divorce and Remarriage: A Redemptive Theology*. Abilene, TX: Leaffwood Publishers, 2007.
- Sherkat, Darren E. and Christopher G. Ellison. "Recent Developments and Current Controversies in the Sociology of Religion." *Annual Review of Sociology* 25, no.1 (1999), 363-394.
- Sidel, Ruth. *Unsung Heroines Single Mothers and the American Dream*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2006.
- Smith, David L. "Divorce and Remarriage from the Early Church to John Wesley," *Trinity Journal* 11, no. 2 (1990), 131-142.
- Smith, Harold Ivan. "Ministry to the Divorced: Your Ebed-Melech Opportunity." *Enrichment Journal* (2013). <http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200003/060-ministry-to-divorced.cfm> (accessed March 21, 2013).
- Smith, Stelman, and Judson Cornwall. *The Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names*. North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos, 1998.
- Stokes, Charles E., and Christopher G. Ellison, "Religion and Attitudes Toward Divorce Laws Among U.S. Adults," *Journal of Family Issues* 31, no.10 (2010), 1279-1304.
<http://academic.research.microsoft.com/Search?query=journal%20of%20family%20issues%20stokes%20and%20ellison> (accessed March 18, 2013).
- Stolzenberg, Ross, Mary Blair-Loy, and Linda J. Waite. "Religious Participation in Early Adulthood: Age and Family Life Cycle Effects on Church Membership." *American Sociological Review* 60, no.1 (1995), 84-103.
- Strauss, Anselm and Juliet Corbin. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990.
- Summit, Jeffrey. *The Lord's Song in a Strange Land: Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Swaim, Wilborn O. "Ministering to the Divorced in the Church." <http://www.angelfire.com/nc/exhortationplace/DIVORCE.htm> (accessed December 20, 2012).
- Swidler, Anne. *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Sylvan, Robin. *Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2002.

- Thatamanil, John J. *The Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament*. Minneapolis, MA: Fortress Press, 2006.
- Thompson, John L. *Reading the Bible with the Dead: What you can Learn from the History of Exegesis that you can't Learn from Exegesis alone*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.
- _____. *Writing the Wrongs: Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo Through the Reformation*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Turner, Deidra Rochelle. "Religion and Womanism in the Lives of Central Texas African American Baptist Women." diss., Texas A&M, August 2007. In Respository Texas A&M, <http://repository.tamu.edu/bitstream/handle/1969.1/ETD-TAM-1619/LLTURNER-DISSERTATION.pdf?> (accessed April 29, 2013).
- USA Today Christians Question Divorce Rates of Faithful. March 3, 2011. www.usatoday30.com/news/religion/2011-03-14-divorce-christians_N.htm#.
- Vaughan, Diane. *Uncoupling: Turning Points in Intimate Relationships*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1986.
- Vogels, Walter. "Hosea's Gift to Gomer," *Biblica* 69, (1988), 412–421.
- Walker, Alice. *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publisher, 1983.
- Wall, Robert W. "Divorce." in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Freedman, David N., Gary A. Herion, David F. Graf, and John David Pleins eds. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992.
- Wallerstein, Judith S. and Sandra Blakeslee. *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade After Divorce*. Boston, MA: Ticknor and Fields, 1989.
- Warner, Stephen R. "2007 Presidential Address: Singing and Solidarity." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 2 (2008), 175–90.
- Webb, A. P., C. G. Ellison, M. J. McFarland, J. W. Lee, K. Morton and J. Walters. "Divorce, Religious Coping and Depressive Symptoms in a Conservative Protestant Religious Group." *Family Relations* 59, no. 5 (2010), 544–557.
- Weems, Renita J. *Battered Love, Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995.
- Weiss, R. S. "The Emotional Impact of Marital Separation." *Journal of Social Issues* 32, (1976), 135–145.

- Whitehead, Barbara Dafoe. *The Divorce Culture*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.
- Wilcox, Bradford W., Mark Chaves, and David Franz. "Focused on the Family? Religious Traditions, Family Discourse, and Pastoral Practice." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 4 (2004), 491–504.
- Wiley, Juniper. "The Dramatization of Emotions in Practice and Theory: Emotion-Work and Emotion roles in a Therapeutic Community." *Sociology of Health & Illness* 12, no. 2 (1990), 127–150.
- Williams, Delores S. "Way Out Yonder, Longing for Home," *The Other Side* 32, (1996): 33.
- . "Womanist Theology: Black Woman's Voices," *Christianity and Crisis* 47, no. 3 (1987), 66–70. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=445> (accessed March 27, 2013).
- Wiseman, Reva S. "Crisis Theory and the Process of Divorce." *Social Casework* 56, no. 1 (1975): 205–212.
- Wolff, Walter H. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Paul D. Hanson, ed. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1974.
- Wolkomir, Michelle. "Emotion-Work, Commitment, and the Authentication of the Self: The Case of Gay and Ex-Gay Christian Support Groups." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 30, no. 3 (2001), 305–334.
- Wright, Bradley R.E. *Christians are Hate-Filled Hypocrites ...and Other Lies You've Been Told* Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2010.
- Yamane, D. and M. Polzer. "Ways of Seeing Ecstasy in Modern Society: Experiential-Expressive and Cultural-Linguisticviews." *Sociology of Religion* 55 (1994), 1–25.
- Yee, Gale A. *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea: A Reaction Critical Investigation*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987.
- Ziegler, P. "Christ For Us Today: Promeity in the Christologies of Bonhoeffer and Kierkegaard." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 5 (2013), 25–41.